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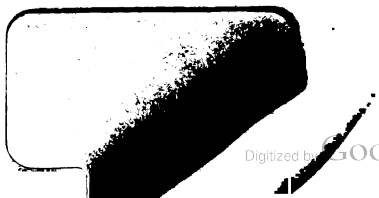

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TO THE BITTER END

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TO THE BITTER END

A Novel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

'LADY AUDLEY'S SECRET'

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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TO THE BITTER END

CHAPTER I.

'ON PLEASURE BENT.'

SUMMER skies and summer woods, quaint old gardens brimming over with roses, a fair supply of carriages and horses, a good cook, and a considerable proportion of youthful spirits, combined to make the little gathering at Clevedon a very pleasant business. There were plenty of show places and a sprinkling of interesting ruins in that fair garden of England; and Lady Clevedon's visitors were rarely at home for luncheon, but were to be found at that social hour either picnicking on the smooth turf in the chancel of a dilapidated abbey, or roughing it in the sanded best parlour of some rustic inn, or camping on the summit of a hill, with a Turneresque landscape spreading wide beneath, and melting into the blue

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sky beyond an opposite range of wooded hills twenty miles away.

Sir Francis Clevedon's horses, and such job-horses as were to be hired in the village of Kingsbury, had rather a hard time of it during these festivities, and may reasonably have wished themselves in any other state of life. Little rest had they in the gloomy, substantial old stables, in the spacious quadrangle, where pear-trees and yellow jasmine climbed over the dark red-brick walls, and a great clock clanged the hours, half-hours, and quarters, with a dissonant clang that outraged the summer quiet. As soon as the cheery, lounging breakfast was over, the morning papers read, and perhaps a stray game of billiards indulged in, while the ladies were dressing for the day's excursion, preparations for the start began on the broad gravel drive in front of the porch. Matrons were duly stowed into landau and barouche; maidens came tripping down the stone steps in riding-gear, with chimney-pot hats perched coquettishly on wonderful structures of puffed and plaited hair; adventurous spirits, eager to drive doubtful horses in tittuppy dog-carts, paused for the signal for departure; dogs barked, footmen and grooms ran to and fro, carrying shawls and sun umbrellas; ponderous

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baskets of comestibles were hung on to the heavier carriages; and at last, Georgie having mounted a mail-phaeton with her husband, in defiance of etiquette, the gay procession move merrily off at a dashing pace down the long avenue, whose glories have been somewhat thinned by Sir Lucas, but which is still a noble alley.

'I *will* drive with you, Frankie,' says the young wife, nestling under her husband's elbow. 'What a tall creature you are up there! I would sooner stay at home at once than sit and prose in that stuffy landau, while you rattled on a quarter of a mile before us, smoking and ha-ha-ha-ing with some horrid man. How is it men are always laughing when they are together? and what in goodness' name do they find to laugh at? They must be either very witty or very idiotic.'

'Not much of the first, I'm afraid, Georgie. Your wit never laughs, and doesn't often make other people laugh. His true province is to set them thinking. Of course I like to have you with me, Miss Crusoe' (this was a pet name, founded on his first remembrance of her), 'but don't you think you ought to be doing company with Mrs. Cheviot and Mrs. Harcross in the landau?'

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'They're very comfortable without me, Frankie,' Georgina answers in a wheedling tone, getting a little closer to the driver's elbow. 'Augusta can get on with any one, in her grand way, and there's auntie too; and they know we haven't been married long, dear, and perhaps they'll think it natural we should like to be together.'

'And of course by and by, when we've been married a little longer, we shall wish to be as far apart as possible,' replies Sir Francis, laughing; and away they go along the bright Kentish roads, where every hedgerow frames a new picture of sweet pastoral beauty, where every fresh turn of the road reveals a panorama that seems fairer than the last,—away they go by hill and valley, by woods and fields, as happy as the skylark carolling in the blue vault above them.

In all these agreeable excursions Mr. Harcross followed in his wife's train. He was never sulky or objective, never languished to stay behind to play billiards or read novels in the dim old library, or smoke perpetual cigars among the roses,—he was only supremely indifferent. The small world of Clevedon considered him a model husband. He was always polite and attentive to his wife when occasion

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called for politeness on his part, brought her shawls and parasols, handed her in and out of carriages, but all without any ill-advised *empressement* which might have reminded people that he had married a fortune. By fits and starts he chose to be brilliant, but at other times was the most silent of the party. People accepted the taciturn humour as natural in a professional man of his standing.

'That fellow Harcross does no end of hard thinking, Joe,' one of the young men of the party observed to his compeer; 'can't make out how he does it. Did you ever try to think, Joey?'

'Yes, once,' answered Joseph gravely: 'I tried to make a safe book for the Derby, and did a lot of thinking over it; but the figures wouldn't come right, and yet they ought. Now, look here, Treby; if you lay a hundred to ten against eleven horses, only one of the eleven can win, you know, and you can't lose anything. If none of 'em win, you make a hundred and ten pounds. That's the secret of the colossal fortunes made by omnibus cads, and that sort of people.'

'Don't seem to see it,' replied Treby; 'I'd rather back the favourite for a place. It isn't such a strain upon one's intellect.'

Did Mr. Harcross enjoy life amidst that merry

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party, with all the verdure and freshness of English landscape about and around him, with young voices ringing in his ear, and young faces smiling on him? Well, no; he rather suffered these pleasures as something that must be got through and endured somehow. Half the time his mind was away in dusty law-courts, or in the Lords committee-room. He could not enjoy the present moment as these people did. That breathless race which he had run for fortune had incapacitated him for holiday-making. It seemed such a foolish waste of time, this dawdling among broken arches, and champagne-drinking at two o'clock in the day, the trivial jokes, the flirtation, and meandering. While the rest were beguiled by such pettiness, he strolled thoughtfully over the gravestones of mitred abbots, weighing his own life, pondering upon what he had won and what he had missed. The ruined abbey, whose aisle he paced, was somewhat suggestive of such contemplation; for it belonged to a law-lord, whose mansion stood a little way off, within sight of those ivy-covered buttresses.

'The monks who built and maintained this place seem a grander race than our law-lords,' he said to himself, 'for they have left a finer monument to mark their existence than Thurlow or Brougham.

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After all, there is nothing like architecture if a man wants to be remembered when he is dust; and that was a pardonable weakness of the Pharaohs which made them go in for incalculable bricks and mortar.'

There were times, however, when Mr. Harcross was more socially inclined, and would even condescend to flirt a little, in a half-cynical way, with the prettiest Miss Stalman, who was disposed to adore him, and in little gushes of confidence to her sister deplored the fact of his marriage. In spite of his habit of retiring within himself occasionally, and withdrawing from the pleasures of the rest, he was eminently popular. First and foremost, because he was a man of mark in his profession, and people liked to be on such intimate terms with so distinguished a person; and secondly, because he talked well when he did choose to talk, and had the gift of at least seeming to know everything under the sun.

'You are so dreadfully clever, Mr. Harcross,' said the pretty Miss Stalman, with a reverential look, after he had told her some legends of the monks who had tossed their censers and sung their masses under the vaulted roof that once had spanned those lofty walls. 'I think you must have read every book that was ever printed.'

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'Not quite. Indeed I doubt if I have read as many books as you have. I am told some young ladies devour a three-volume novel in a day, and that, knocking off Sundays and an occasional saint's day, would make nine hundred volumes a year. Allow them seven years of novel reading, and there you have six thousand three hundred volumes. I don't believe I've read so many as that. But I thought, as we were to lunch in the cloisters, every one would be eager to know something about the abbey; so I looked it up in the history of Kent while you ladies were dressing.'

'It is so nice to be with some one who knows all about gothic architecture,' murmured Miss Stalman, with a faint sigh. 'My sympathies are with everything mediæval.'

Several people at Clevedon had observed the likeness between Mr. Harcross and his host. They might have been brothers or first-cousins, people said, and were more like each other than many men so related. Hubert Harcross's type of face was to be seen in ever so many of the Clevedon portraits, as Weston Vallory, the all-seeing, pointed out one wet morning when the visitors were confined to the house, and tramped the galleries restlessly in their search for amusement.

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'It's really a singular fact, that likeness,' he said; 'especially as my friend Harcross's face is by no means a common one. There's that slight projection of the under lip, for instance, which gives what some people call a cynical expression to the mouth—that's a regular Clevedon mark. You see it in the chief-justice yonder, with the Ramilies wig, and in the old colonel of dragoons over there. Very curious, these accidental resemblances.'

There was a full-length portrait of Sir Lucas in the drawing-room, by Lawrence—rather an effeminate figure, in the famous Regency swallow-tail coat and high stock—and in this picture also the likeness between the Clevedons and Mr. Harcross was obvious. All that made the strength of Hubert's face was wanting in the spendthrift's thoughtless countenance; but the likeness was not the less palpable.

'You are like what my father would have been if he had ever learned to think,' said Sir Francis; 'but he never did. Even misfortune could not teach him that lesson. He only acquired the art of grumbling.'

'Ye shall know them by their fruits,' said Mr. Harcross sententiously. 'Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?'

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Sir Francis looked at him wonderingly for a moment, but said nothing; whereupon somebody began to criticise the fashionable attire of the year '20, and the conversation drifted into another channel.

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CHAPTER II.

'AND ONE WITH YOU I COULD NOT BE.'

Mr. Harcross was alone in the picture gallery that rainy August afternoon. There was a grand billiard match going on downstairs, a fight for the championship of Clevedon, between Captain Hardwood and Mr. M'Gall, the Scottish reviewer, and all the youth and sprightliness of Clevedon, made sprightlier by a luncheon which had been prolonged to double its usual length on account of the dismal weather, was assembled to witness the struggle. Mr. Harcross could hear the babble and laughter as he paced the long gallery, from whose panelled wall departed Clevedons seemed to scowl upon him in the doubtful light. There had been a talk of the day improving after luncheon, and barometers had been tapped inquiringly by dainty knuckles; but the dense gray sky had grown grayer and more leaden, and the steady rain of the morning had only become a little heavier in the afternoon. There was more wind now

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than there had been in the morning, and a stormy gust drove the rain against the windows every now and then, and the ancient sashes rattled like the ports of a ship at sea. The long picture gallery, cheerful enough on a sunny day, when the landscape outside the windows was a thing of beauty, looked somewhat blank and dismal this afternoon. There was a wide fireplace at each end of the room, with spindle-legged silver tongs and shovel chained to the wall of the chimneypiece: the stately apartment would have been all the better even on this August day for a couple of blazing fires. Mr. Harcross shivered once or twice during his monotonous promenade; but though there were plenty of cheerful rooms in the house, he chose to occupy this. He had borne the morning well enough—had played chess with Mrs. Cheviot, had flirted with the pretty Miss Stalman, had found some rare old volumes in the library, and produced and explained them for the edification of the elder and more intellectual Miss Stalman; had done all that a man could do, weather-bound in another man's country-house, to maintain his popularity. But the afternoon had found him exhausted. His professional career had not adapted him for the endurance of ten hours' labour in this line. He re-

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quired to be sustained by some keener interest than was to be found in this trifling kind of existence. He could find perpetual mental refreshment in his briefs, dull and commonplace as they might seem to an outsider. There was always some interesting technicality, some legal knot to be untied by his dexterous hand, some subtle pitfall to be planned for the opposite side. But in this company-life, this little colony of guests thrown together at random, like shipwrecked strangers on a desert island, pretending to be congenial and perpetually amused, he could find neither interest nor delight.

He was walking to and fro in a dreary way, letting his idle thoughts wander where they would, when the door at the end of the gallery opened and he heard the rustling of a silk dress. Perhaps no one else of his acquaintance ever wore such rich silk or such long trains as Augusta, or it may have been a mere fancy on his part; but he always imagined that her garments had a peculiar rustle, and he looked up now, startled by the familiar sound, to find that he had not been deceived. It was his wife who had opened the door.

She came towards him slowly, with a rigid look in her face, that hardly promised a pleasant encounter.

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'The idea of your being here, Hubert, all by yourself!'

'Why should I not be here, Augusta, and by myself, for once in a way? Have I not been living in public long enough to satisfy even your views of one's duty to society? I'm rather glad to stretch my legs here, and think my own thoughts and do a little yawning. If you knew how often I've languished for a comfortable yawn lately!'

'What nonsense, Hubert!' Mrs. Harcross exclaimed, with vexation. 'I've been looking for you all over the house. Every one else is in the billiard-room.'

'Then I am sure I cannot be missed.'

'O, yes, you are. Your friend the youngest Miss Stalman has been inquiring about you—"Mr. Harcross would be able to decide that;" "Mr. Harcross would be so interested in this;" and so on. How I detest girls who are always going on about married men!'

'Has the youngest Miss Stalman that infirmity? Perhaps it has arisen from a dearth of single men; they do seem rather a scarce commodity. However, Miss Stalman can exist very well without me for an afternoon or so. I hope you haven't been dull, Augusta.'

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'I have not been particularly gay. I don't care about billiards, as you know; and I have looked through all the books in the last box from London, and there is really nothing in them; and there seems no chance of our getting a drive before dinner.'

'Not unless you defy the elements, my dear. Suppose you stop and have a walk with me—this is a capital room for an indoor constitutional; and we so seldom have any opportunity for confidential talk nowadays. Don't you think this kind of visiting is something like living under a glass case?'

'I do not find that we ever have much to say to each other when opportunity does favour us,' Mrs. Harcross replied stiffly. 'You appear to be much more eloquent in the society of Miss Lucy Stalman.'

'Miss Stalman is not my wife,' replied Mr. Harcross with a careless shrug. 'I am not obliged to be in earnest when I talk to her; I am only doing company. Besides, that kind of balderdash is my trade, and I may as well keep my hand in; it is the sort of stuff with which I beguile my adversaries and amuse my colleagues at Westminster. Come, Augusta,' he said, seeing no sign of brightening in his wife's moody countenance, 'you are not going to be jealous

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of Lucy Stalman, *par exemple*. I thought that kind of thing was quite out of your line.'

'I suppose you thought it out of my line to care for you, or to feel your coldness,' she answered bitterly.

'My dear Augusta, how unreasonable this is!' exclaimed Mr. Harcross, taken somewhat by surprise at this unwonted display of feeling. 'Can you for a moment imagine that it has been any gratification to me to talk to that young woman, or that I take the faintest interest in her? I was obliged to do something—to put on a kind of spurious gaiety—to contribute my quota to the general clatter.'

They had not begun their promenade, but were standing in the middle of the gallery, near a carved-oak buffet, on which there was a dusty collection of oriental china, cracked saucers and Canton cups, which had been considered priceless gems of art in their day. Mr. Harcross stood idly fingering the fragile teacups, changing their positions as if he had been playing a game of thimble-rig with them. Mrs. Harcross walked away to one of the windows with a little impatient sigh, and stood looking out at the dim rain-blotted landscape.

'It is not that,' she said presently, in a contemp-

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tuous tone. 'You cannot suppose that I could be jealous of such a frivolous chit as Lucy Stalman. It is not that, Hubert; it is only—' She broke down suddenly with a choking sound that was like a stifled sob.

'Only what, my dear?' Mr. Harcross asked, tearing himself away from the teacups and going over to her. Her face was turned so resolutely towards the window that he could not see it without a greater effort than it was natural for him to make; he could only lay his hand gently on her shoulder, and repeat his question in a somewhat graver tone.

There was no answer, but the choking sound was not repeated. Mrs. Harcross stood steady as a rock.

'What is the meaning of all this, Augusta? What is amiss between us?'

'What is amiss between us!' she repeated. 'Do you need to be told that? Is it not sufficiently obvious to the dullest comprehension what is amiss between us? A trifle. Only that you have never loved me.'

'Who has been putting this stuff into your head, Augusta?'

'My own reason. The knowledge began to dawn upon me a long time ago, even in London, where our

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lives were so busy, and we were hardly ever alone. It has become a little clearer to me, perhaps, in this house, where we have been thrown more together, and where I have had time to observe other married couples, and to see the difference between their union and ours.'

'I suppose you mean Sir Francis and Lady Clevedon, who are only just out of their honeymoon, and are in the gushing stage. Unfortunately, you see, I cannot gush. If you expect that kind of thing from me, you will always have ground for complaint. In the first place, I am, I daresay, ten years older than Frank Clevedon; and, in the second place, I am built of a harder kind of wood. I don't break out into leaf and blossom as that sort of man does.'

'I don't exact anything, Hubert,' his wife answered gloomily. 'I have only made a discovery. It is one that I have made by degrees; but I think it has come fully home to me in this house.'

If she had hoped to wring protestations of affection from him by this upbraiding, if she had thought to extort some tender avowal by this complaint, she must needs have been sorely disappointed by the calm business-like tone of his reply.

'My dear Augusta,' he began, with a manner that

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was at once kindly and serious, 'I am the last man upon earth to argue such a point as this; indeed, it is not one that will admit of argument. Call domestic love into question, and it ceases to be. It is too delicate a blossom to bear rough handling. God knows I have tried to do my duty, have never knowingly thwarted a wish of yours, however trivial. So far from wishing to loosen the tie that binds us, I would gladly have it made closer. I wish we had children, my dear, and that our fine house was more like home. I wish society claimed rather less of your attention, and that you could sympathise more warmly with my pursuits and aspirations, small as they may be. Come, Augusta, let us leave matrimonial bickerings to sillier people than you and I. I told you this was an unlucky house for me to come to; do not make me too true a prophet.'

'An unlucky house for you to come to!' echoed Augusta, turning to him with a sudden suspicion in her face. 'No; you did not say that. You were only unwilling to come. What do you mean by this being an unlucky house?'

'Does it not seem in a fair way to prove so, when you begin a kind of upbraiding which I never heard from you before?'

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'You are always talking in enigmas, Hubert, and I never knew any one from whom it was more difficult to get a straight answer. I want to know why you call this house unlucky.'

'Are you very anxious for an answer?' he inquired with a provoking coolness.

They were standing face to face by this time. He had not often seen his wife so much in earnest. He smiled at her eagerness with a somewhat wintry smile.

'I am very anxious.'

'Then I will answer you in five words—Because it is not mine.'

His wife looked at him for a few moments in utter silence, as if petrified by surprise.

'Because it is not yours, Hubert!' she repeated. 'You call this house unlucky because it is not yours! Do you wish me to suppose that you are capable of so paltry a sentiment as envy; that you actually envy Sir Francis the possession of Clevedon?'

'Hardly that. Frank Clevedon is a good fellow enough, and I harbour no grudge against *him*. In point of fact, I rather like him. Yet were I disposed to be bitter, this place is very well calculated to inspire bitterness. I am only human, Augusta; status is the prize I have worked for, and you know how

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hard I have worked, and how little of what people call the pleasures of this life I have tasted. A man cannot serve two masters: my master has been Success, and I have served him well. Yet I think I would rather have the position that a good old name, supported by such an estate as this, gives a man than the best place I am ever likely to win at the Bar.'

'That is quite possible,' replied Augusta, rather contemptuously. 'I might like very well to be a duchess; but if my most intimate friend happened to be one, I should not envy her her strawberry leaves.'

'The cases are not parallel, my dear. There may be peculiar reasons why I should feel some touch of bitterness about Clevedon.'

'Peculiar reasons! What reasons for bitterness can you possibly have in relation to a place that you never saw till ten days ago?'

'How do you know that I had not seen it before?'

'Because you did not say so.'

'I might not care about talking of the place. You know that I did not like coming to it—that you brought me here against my will.'

'I begin to think Weston was right, and that some association with your stay at Brierwood Farm made this visit painful to you!'

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The dark stern face flushed, and then paled. In spite of the mastery which Mr. Harcross had acquired over his emotions, there were some home thrusts that made their mark.

'I was not thinking of my stay at Brierwood,' he said, recovering himself promptly. 'I had seen Clevedon before I saw Brierwood.'

'How singularly uncommunicative you were upon the subject, then!' said Augusta in an offended tone. Never had she felt so angry with him; no, not even on the night of their first quarrel. It was a smouldering fire, which perhaps had been kindled then, and had been fanned into flame by Weston's insinuations.

'I tell you again, it is not a subject I care about discussing. By the way, you mentioned Weston Vallory just now, in a manner which leads me to conclude that I am indebted to him for this afternoon's unexpected outbreak. Now, I am not given to threatening, but it is only fair to tell you that any interference of that kind, and from that quarter, is just the likeliest influence in the world to make a life-long breach between us. I know Mr. Weston Vallory by heart, and—tolerate him. But let me once see his finger in my domestic affairs, and it will be war to the knife between us. You would have to make your election

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between your husband and your cousin. It's hardly worth while prolonging a conversation that seems destined to be unpleasant,' he added after a brief pause. 'I'll go down to the billiard-room and see how the match is getting on.'

He walked towards the door, but Augusta stopped him.

'You shall not leave me like that, Hubert,' her voice tremulous, her breast heaving with suppressed passion. 'What do I care for Weston Vallory? He is my first cousin, and he is useful and obliging; but you know that I do little more than—tolerate him. But I am not going to be put off in this way. I am determined to penetrate the secret of your dislike to this house. I don't think I have a jealous nature, but that there should be a secret between you and me is something more than I can bear. There is a woman at the bottom of this mystery, Hubert.'

'What if I admit the fact?' said Mr. Harcross coolly.

'There *is* a woman concerned in your secret, then!' cried Augusta breathlessly.

'Yes. My secret, as you call it, concerns a woman who died thirty years ago, and that woman was my mother.'

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'Your mother!'

'Yes, Augusta. You have goaded me into this confession, as you surprised me into a former one. Heaven knows whether it is best for both of us that I should be thus candid; whether we shall seem any nearer to each other when you know all that makes the brief and bitter story of my life; but since you make this business into a grievance, and seem to take the matter so deeply to heart, I may as well tell you everything there is to be told. Do you remember the night Sir Francis Clevedon dined at your father's house — the first time you saw him?'

'Perfectly,' murmured Augusta, looking at him with a face full of wonder and vague expectancy. 'But what can that have to do with your secret?'

'You remember that on that first meeting you were struck by the likeness between him and me, and since we have been here you have heard all these frivolous fools babbling about my resemblance to the Clevedon portraits.'

'Of course I have heard them.'

'And yet the fact has never suggested any idea, any suspicion? You have never so much as wondered whether there might not be a reason for so

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marked a likeness between two men, who are, to all appearance, strangers?'

'What reason could there be?' exclaimed Augusta, with a frightened look.

'That Francis Clevedon's father and mine were the same.'

'What!' cried his wife, with unutterable horror. 'You are the—illegitimate brother of the master of this house?'

'No; I will not take upon myself that stigma. I have no certain knowledge as to the legitimacy or illegitimacy of my birth. I only know that the man who blighted my mother's life was Sir Lucas Clevedon. I have told you before to-day that I could never discover whether he did or did not marry her. There was only one man likely to know the truth—that man was Lord Dartmoor, my father's most intimate friend, but he died and made no sign. All that I know is, that about a year before my mother's death, Sir Lucas, at Lord Dartmoor's instigation, sold an estate of some value, and settled the purchase-money upon my mother and me. Now I do not believe Sir Lucas Clevedon was the kind of man to make any such sacrifice without a motive, and that a motive stronger than a selfish man's love. It is quite possible there had been some sort of

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marriage abroad, and that this settlement was the price he paid for secrecy. Yet I hardly think if the ceremony had been valid—a marriage that would hold water in a law-court—my mother would have sold my birthright. I love her too dearly to believe that she could be unjust to her child. I love her too dearly to believe that she was ever anything less than my father's wife.'

'And you have never even thought of asserting your rights?' asked Augusta.

'Never. If I have rights, I have no evidence to prove them, not so much as the certificate of my birth. Nor do I even know where I was born, nor by what name my wretched existence was recorded in the register of humanity. I am not the man to advance a claim I could not support, or wantonly to bring dishonour upon my mother's name by dragging the question of my birthright before the world. The settlement which my father made was sufficient to secure me a good education, and to keep me respectably while I waited for my first brief. I owe it to Lord Dartmoor that I began life at Harrow and Oxford. I owe it to Lord Dartmoor that I was not a shoeless pickpocket, sleeping under the dark arches in the Adelphi.'

Augusta Harcross covered her face with her hands

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and shuddered visibly. She was a woman to whom this kind of thing, this doubtful birth, this possibility of naked feet and dark arches, was unspeakably horrible. To her, who had been nurtured in the luxurious lap of middle-class prosperity, the thoughts of these degrading circumstances were as glimpses of some nethermost gulf, too black and deep to be looked into. She covered her face involuntarily, as if by that gesture she would fain have shut out the full horror of the situation. That she should have married a man so situated seemed to her the bitterest shame that could have befallen her —a disgrace from which there could be no recovery. And she had chosen him as a man likely to achieve distinction for her—a man whose name it would be an honour to bear. Great heavens! what a revelation! Future ages would know of her as the wife of Sir Lucas Clevedon's illegitimate son. Such secrets may be hidden for the moment, but leak out in history.

'His brother!' she said at last. 'Sir Lucas Clevedon's unacknowledged son! O, why did you ever bring me here?'

'It was you who insisted on my coming.'

'Do you suppose that I would have come here if

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I had known this?' cried Mrs. Harcross indignantly. 'The very name of the place would have been detestable to me.'

'If it has become so now we can go away at once,' replied Hubert quietly. 'There is nothing to hinder us.'

'And challenge suspicion by the very fact of our going! After all the talk about your likeness to these Clevedons, too! I daresay there are people who suspect already. It is too horrible to think of.'

'I am sorry I told you this since the discovery is so painful to you.'

'Painful! You have stung me to the heart. To think of *my* husband in such a position—not daring to acknowledge his own brother—a visitor in his father's house without the right to utter his father's name!'

'It is a pity my parents were not wiser in their generation,' said Mr. Harcross with a contemptuous laugh. 'If my mother had drowned me in Lake Lucerne, for instance; or if my father had dropped me out of the travelling carriage on the edge of some convenient precipice, you would have been spared this humiliation.'

'Laugh at me as much as you please. But

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dearly as I have loved you, I think I would rather you had died long ago than that I should have lived to suffer what I suffer to-day,' said Mrs. Harcross; and with those words she sundered the frail bond that had bound her husband's heart with a sentiment which was half remorse, half gratitude. His gratitude and his remorseful sense of having wronged her perished together, as he listened to that ruthless speech.

'I do not think there are many wives who would have taken such a revelation in such a spirit,' he replied, with an exceeding calmness; 'but I do think that your character is the natural outcome of your surroundings, and I am hardly surprised. Am I to conclude that you wish to remain here until the proposed end of your visit?'

'Certainly. I will do nothing to make people talk.'

'As you please. I came here to gratify you, and shall remain until you're tired. It's half-past six, I see,' looking at his watch. 'Isn't it time you began to think about dressing for dinner?'

His quiet tone betrayed no emotion whatever. If he were offended ever so deeply, she could not tell how much or how little. There was no quickened

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breathing, no unsteadiness of the voice, nor the faintest quiver of the firm thin lips.

'Your toilet is such an important business,' he said; 'and mine only an affair of half an hour. I'll go and smoke my cigar in the colonnade while you make your election between pink and blue.' And so they parted; he to go, as he had said, to one of the stone colonnades at the end of the house, where he took another solitary promenade, and solaced his wounded spirit with a cigar.

'I'm glad I told her,' he said to himself. 'I'm glad she showed me her nature in all its nakedness. Great heaven! what a narrow selfish soul! Not a thought of my loss, or my dishonour. Only herself —the cheat practised upon herself. I don't think I ever understood her thoroughly until to-day. At least I have done with compunction; I shall feel no more remorse for having contracted an engagement I cannot conscientiously fulfil. She only wanted a position, and that I have won for her. Loved me! she never can have loved me; if she had, she would have flung herself upon my breast to-day, and sobbed out her shame *for me* upon my heart. If I had told Grace Redmayne my story! O God! I can see the sweet sympathetic face lifted up to mine, the tender

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eyes shining through a mist of tears. I can almost feel the touch of the dear dead hands. O, my love, my love! you would have perished to save my soul from pain; yet your memory is "the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched."'

Tullion had rather a hard time of it that evening at the toilet of her mistress. Mrs. Harcross, although distinguished at all times by a bearing which her maid called 'orty,' or 'stand-offish,' was, for the most part, a lady of even temper. She was too proud to fly into a passion with a servant, or betray vexation at the failure of a new dress. That omnipresent and mysterious deity called 'Society' reigned supreme even in Augusta's dressing-room. She would not suffer her maid to see a countenance which she could not present to Society. This evening, however, Mrs. Harcross was evidently out of sorts.

'Why didn't you order a fire in my room, Tullion?' she exclaimed, looking contemptuously at the grate with its summer finery of paper shavings. 'On such a miserable day as this, a fire is an absolute necessity.'

'I can light it this moment, ma'am, if you like,' replied the dutiful Tullion, ready to speed off in quest of coals and wood.

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'And smother me with smoke!' cried Augusta. 'No, thank you. I daresay all these old chimneys smoke abominably. What induced you to put out that diamond necklet?' she asked, pointing to a fiery serpent, coiled on a purple velvet cushion, a *chef-d'œuvre* of the jeweller's art, and her father's wedding present. 'Do you suppose I am going to parade the contents of my jewel-case every evening?'

'I beg your pardon, ma'am, if I was wrong. But I thought you would wear the amber silk and black lace, and being rather a 'eavy dress, it wants the relief of di'monds. You've not worn the amber yet.'

'I hate amber. Every woman with black hair wears amber. And the dress with the Maltese flounces is not amber, but maize. I wish you would learn to call colours by their right names. You can take out my black silk train.'

'Black silk, ma'am!' exclaimed Tullion, aghast. 'There ain't a death among the crowned heads of Europe, is there, ma'am?'

'Crowned heads, nonsense!'

'I thought it might be rile mourning, ma'am. You so seldom wear black.'

'Pray don't argue the point, Tullion; I shall wear black silk this evening.'

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It was a petty caprice, no doubt, for so lofty a mind. But Mrs. Harcross had conceived a sudden horror of all that finery which had been hitherto the chief occupation and delight of her days. The treasures of those vast travelling-cases, brimming over with silks, and satins, and laces, and furbelows, seemed all at once transformed into so much sackcloth and ashes. Good heavens, was she to make herself splendid and conspicuous only to be pointed out as the wife of Sir Lucas Clevedon's natural son? How could she tell how many people knew the story of her husband's birth? This Lord Dartmoor who was in the secret might have told his friends right and left, and such knowledge spreads like a prairie fire. It was not because Mr. Harcross fancied his story unknown that it really was so. Half the people who shook his hand and ate his dinners might be familiar with the circumstances of his birth, and might secretly despise him. It was like living in an atmosphere of contempt.

So the glittering snake, and two infant snakes, his companions, which had coiled themselves into earrings, were put away in their velvet beds, and Mrs. Harcross wore a lustrous black silk dress, with a train three yards long, over which, when hard

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pressed by Tullion, she consented to wear a tunic of old point lace, which a Roman-catholic bishop might have envied. Dressed thus, with a knot of scarlet ribbon in her dark hair, and an antique cross of black pearls upon her neck, Mrs. Harcross looked more distinguished than in a more elaborate costume.

'There's nothing that don't become you, ma'am!' said the maid rapturously, as she looped up the tunic with a spray of scarlet geranium. 'Even black, which is so very trying to most brunette ladies.'

Mrs. Harcross contemplated herself contemptuously in the cheval glass before which she was standing, with the maid on her knees at her feet.

What did it matter how well or how ill she looked? She was only the wife of Sir Lucas Clevedon's illegitimate son.

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CHAPTER III.

'BUT DEAD THAT OTHER WAY.'

MR. WESTON VALLORY, by an undeviating persistence in the habits of industry, had brought himself to such a high state of training, that it was impossible for him to be idle. At his box at Norwood, neatest and daintiest of bachelor boxes, Weston rose with the lark and was out and about before the milkman. Woe be to the housemaid and the cook if Mr. Vallory's morning cup of strong tea was not on the little table by his bed-side at half-past five in the summer and at six in the winter! Woe be to the gardener if his master, in his early constitutional, found a weed perking its shameless head amidst the lobelia or verbena in the ribbon bordering, or if the iron roller were not at work betimes upon the gravel, or if the miniature croquet lawn was not close-cropped as the hair of a convict's head! Like clockwork were the arrangements of Weston's modest household. He would give little dinners that were perfection, with

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his two servants, and a brace of men with trays, who ran down express from Birch's, and gave the finishing touch to their dishes in the tiny Norwood kitchen. Weston could get twice as much work out of his servants as any common master, by reason of his own unflinching industry.

'I never ask you for anything at unreasonable hours,' he said; 'I never keep you up late at night;' and indeed his latch-key would have rendered this a useless tyranny, as well as an inconvenient one; for few people, besides Mr. Weston Vallory himself, were acquainted with the hour of his return. The servants rarely heard him go up-stairs to his room, but at half-past six in the morning he was walking in his garden, fresh and blooming as his standard roses.

'I can do with very little sleep,' he said, in his moments of confidence. 'Indeed, I consider the habit of going to bed every night an absurd conventionality. In the age of iron, depend upon it, there was no such custom. Do you suppose Julius Cæsar or William the Conqueror called for his chamber-candle every night, and shuffled off to bed like a retired tallow-chandler? There never would have been any stir in the world, if the leaders of men

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had wasted half their time in sleep in our jog-trot fashion.'

A medical friend of Mr. Vallory's, who heard these remarks, ventured to suggest that our lunatic asylums would be more thickly peopled if sleep went out of fashion.

'Very possibly,' replied Weston, with his careless air; 'I daresay there might be a run upon the mad-houses. You see the question depends very much upon the stuff a man is made of. Take Napoleon the First as an example. He was content with four hours' sleep, and yet he kept himself sane under circumstances which would have sent most men off their heads.'

Weston Vallory, perhaps considering that he was made of Napoleonic stuff, rarely indulged himself with more than four hours of that placid slumber which is apt to bless the pillow of a man who is thoroughly satisfied with himself and his own line of life. Thus it was that at Clevedon, after leaving the smoking-room among the last of the night birds, Mr. Vallory generally made his morning toilet to the earliest music of the thrushes and blackbirds on the lawn under his window. Other guests, who would be early enough a week or two hence, turned their faces to the wall,

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and pleaded against the stern sense of duty for a little more sleep and a little more slumber. He was in the garden among the rain-beaten roses and passion flowers when the stable clock struck six, on the morning after that day of hopeless downpour which had sorely afflicted the butterfly guests at Clevedon—a peerless summer morning, with a cloudless blue sky and the balmiest air that ever fluttered the roses. If he had been a lover of nature in a Wordsworthian sense, he would have yielded himself up to the soft intoxication of the hour—would have drained to the last drop the enchanted cup of a vague delight. If he had been a painter, he might have revelled in a feast of form and colour—might have composed any number of graceful pictures, with fair figures of his own imagining in the foreground, and those long walks and stiff yew hedges and ancient flower-borders for background and framework. If he had been a pre-Raphaelite, there was enough in every single dew-laden rose-bush; in every cluster of tall lilies lifting up their slender stems amongst tangled masses of carnation or periwinkle; even in the time-worn sundial, gray and grim and stony and moss-grown, amidst the flaunting young hollyhocks, flaming crimson and yellow, to hold him spell-bound, idly gazing. But as

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he happened to be none of these things, his only impression was of a garden carelessly kept, and of Sir Francis Clevedon's weakness of mind in allowing his work to be done so badly.

Not long did the garden suffice to employ his active mind. He was not a student of velvet-rose petals begemmed with dew. He smoked his 'Cavajal;' took a thoughtful walk under the rose-laden arches, and then departed by a little wicket opening into the park.

'I shall have time to reconnoitre this mysterious Brierwood before breakfast,' he said to himself. 'I wonder how our friend Harcross likes the notion of my being down here. He ought to know that, if there is any little secret history attached to his experiences in this part of the country, I am just the kind of man to hunt up the details. How ridiculously fond Augusta is of him! Not because he is handsomer, or better, or cleverer than other men. I verily believe it is simply because he does not care a straw about her. There was profound truth in that remark of somebody's: "The only way of making love nowadays is to take not the slightest notice of the lady."'

He walked through that wilder part of the park, where the Spanish chestnuts rose like leafy towers

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towards the summer sky, by the way that Hubert Walgrave and Grace Redmayne had taken in the sunset when they met with the viper. For him that wild forest verdure had no peculiar charm—was, indeed, no more lovely than a trim public garden fresh from the hands of some modern Capability Brown. Yet he did not walk with his eyes cast down, as one whose outward vision is in abeyance, while sordid speculations fill his soul. He looked about him and perceived that everything was very green and blue and sunny, like Kensington Gardens run wild, and shifted beyond the odour of London smoke.

'A fine old place! he thought; 'a man who keeps it in no better order than this hardly deserves to have it.'

The south lodge was better tenanted and more smartly appointed than it had been on that summer day when Grace and her lover entered this sylvan scene by the dilapidated oaken gate. The little gothic dwelling-place had been patched up, scarlet geraniums were trained against the newly pointed brickwork. There were no broken windows now, as there had been in those days of poverty and neglect, but shining lattices, with crisp muslin curtains behind them, and in one special window a basket of blue-and-yellow

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beadwork, with a canary hanging in a brass cage above it.

'Woman's work, evidently,' thought Mr. Vallory; and he was in no wise astonished when the little gothic door opened with a sudden bounce, and a damsel tripped out with the key of the gate.

She was the daughter of the head gardener, and a somewhat distinguished young person in her particular walk of life. She was, by common consent, allowed to be the prettiest girl in the three villages of Rayton, Hubbleford, and Kingsbury, and the most consummate flirt. At twenty-three she had broken more hearts than she cared to count, and was now busily engaged in demolishing a very honest one, in the possession of Joseph Flood, Sir Francis Clevedon's own groom, her recognised and legitimate adorer, a young man who had money in the savings-bank, and a praiseworthy yearning to begin life as a grocer and confectioner, with a dash of ready-made boots and shoes, and perhaps a sprinkling of linen-drapery, in the village of Rayton, a little fringe of houses and tiny shops on the high road near Clevedon Park, which was familiarly known to the Clevedon retainers as 'up-street.'

As Jane Bond came tripping across the tiny lodge

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garden this morning, serenely conscious of a well-starched and well-fitting cotton gown, Weston Vallory thought that he had never seen a prettier woman. He was not a man of ultra-refined taste in the matter of feminine beauty. This florid full-flavoured style, this shining black hair, these black eyes, rosy cheeks, and ripe red lips, realised his highest notions upon the subject. His archetypal woman would have been no lovelier than Jane Bond, whose features were regular although commonplace, and whose bold black eyes were set off by a peerless complexion of the rustic brunette order.

He went towards the gate quite silently, struck dumb for the moment by admiration, but not for long. His agreeable cockney breeding quickly reasserted itself, with that gracious ease of manner which was wont to distinguish him.

'Do many people come to Clevedon this way?' he asked, surveying the girl with a look of somewhat audacious admiration.

'Not very many, sir,' Miss Bond answered with a careless shrug, not at all disconcerted by that undisguised homage. 'It's awful dull.'

'Then I'm sure they can't know what a pretty girl there is to open the gate,' said Weston, 'or

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they'd come by this lodge if it was a mile out of their way. The men, I mean, of course; the women would hardly like to be reminded of their own ugliness by such a contrast.'

This was the sort of thing which suited Miss Bond, and to which she was tolerably accustomed. She was able to retort upon Mr. Vallory with an impudent readiness which was apt to pass for wit among her admirers—'to give him as good as he brought,' as she said afterwards when she described the little scene to the postman's daughter, her friend and confidante.

Her ready answers charmed Mr. Vallory, so, although on business intent, he dawdled a little in the early summer morning, to indulge in a kind of badinage which he had practised considerably with young ladies of the ballet-girl and barmaid class, and which he knew how to adapt to the simpler tastes of this rustic beauty. He wasted a quarter of an hour or so in this conversation, and by the end of that time was on quite a friendly footing with the damsel. She had informed him that her father was a Primitive Methodist, a member of the flock led by a certain Joshua Bogg, an enlightened tailor, whose temple was at Hubbleford, and that he was very strict and

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stern with her. She had told him what a dull life she had at the south lodge, and how much she had preferred living up-street in Rayton, where she and her father had abode until Sir Francis came to Clevedon, though their dwelling there had been less convenient, and they had had no garden.

'There was always some one to speak to at Rayton,' she said, 'if it was only old women and children. But here there's no one.'

'Isn't there, now?' said Weston. 'Why, I should have thought people would come any distance to talk to such a girl as you—a girl who is as clever as she's handsome.'

'Ah, there's plenty of that kind,' replied Miss Bond, with a little supercilious toss of her head; 'plenty that would come and hang about the place, if I'd let 'em, and get me into disgrace with father, and set people talking. But I don't want that kind of thing; I never have encouraged it, though they do call me a flirt.'

'O, they do call you a flirt!' said Weston. 'But, my dear girl, you are a great deal too clever not to know that slander is a kind of tribute which the world pays to superior merit. If you were not the prettiest girl within twenty miles, no one would trouble him-

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self—or herself, for it is generally herself who is troubled about such matters—by remarking your flirtations. There are women who would give the world to lose their reputation in the same way.'

Miss Bond did not dispute the wisdom of these remarks. 'It don't much matter to me, any way,' she said, 'except when it sets father scolding, and ding-donging the Scriptures at me, as if *I* was the daughter of Sion, or as if *I* ever sat upon seven hills. Howsomedever, I shall be out of it all soon, that's one comfort, and out of this dull hole, and living in Rayton.'

This was said with a tone and a simper which were quite enough for Mr. Vallory's enlightenment.

'You mean that you are going to be married?' he said.

'Yes, I suppose so, before very long. I've been a long time making up my mind, but I've been bothered into making it up at last. I'm going to settle.'

'Settle!' cried Weston. 'What an odious word, miserably expressive of an odious fact! Such a beauteous butterfly as you should never "settle" upon one flower, while all the gardens of earth lie before

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you. Settle! Make an end of all the uncertainties of life, and tie yourself down to a cottage at Rayton. If you only knew your own value, my dear Miss Bond, you would not dream of such a sacrifice. Settle! Why, a woman with your advantages should never dream of marrying on the right side of thirty. How can a woman tell what her chances may be till she has come to the meridian of her beauty? At eighteen she may be engaged to a gardener, and at eight-and-twenty she may find herself a duchess. But perhaps you don't know the history of the slave girl, who married the great Russian emperor; and possibly you may never have heard of the famous Polly who became Duchess of Bolton, and who never was your equal in good looks.'

'I suppose you know this young woman you call Polly?' said Miss Bond curiously. She was not at all disinclined to listen to this kind of talk. It opened dazzling vistas of thought, a vague glittering vision of a possible future. She had dreamed her ambitious dreams, even in the lonely south lodge; but the wildest imaginings that could arise spontaneously in her untutored brain had been small and sordid, in comparison with such ideas as were conjured up by the suggestions of Weston Vallory.

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'No,' he said with his supercilious grin, 'I had not the honour of knowing Polly. She was before my time. But I have seen her portrait by Hogarth—a sallow sharp-featured beauty, in a mob cap, acting Polly Peacham between two rows of fine gentlemen seated at the side scenes. You are a hundred times handsomer than Polly.'

He looked at his watch. This rustic philandering was pleasant enough, but at the best it was a waste of time, and Weston Vallory's industrious habits had made waste of time almost impossible to him. He had business to get through that morning before breakfast.

'You know Brierwood Farm, of course, Miss Bond?' he said.

The girl stared at him wonderingly. This sudden transition from a florid compliment to a commonplace question took her a little by surprise.

'Lor, yes, I know Brierwood well enough—Farmer Redmayne's.'

'Redmayne—yes, I think that is the name. But the Redmayne race have migrated, have they not? They have all gone to Australia, I hear.'

'Gone and come back,' Miss Bond answered carelessly, twirling her big key with a somewhat

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offended air. She did not quite relish this unceremonious cutting short of the talk about her own beauty and possible offers of marriage from dukes.

'Come back?'

'Yes; Mr. Redmayne—Richard Redmayne, O, come back this ever so long — before the hay was carted, about the time Sir Francis was married. And they do say he's changed so that those who knew him best five years ago would hardly know him now.'

'And what has changed him in such a remarkable manner?' asked Weston, with eager interest.

'Troubles,' answered Miss Bond, shaking her head solemnly.

'What kind of troubles?—money troubles?'

'O, dear, no. Folks say he found no end of gold in Australia, and that he could buy Clevedon off Sir Francis, if he chose. It isn't want of money makes him so gloomy. I met him on Kingsbury Common one evening, just as it was growing dark, close upon a month ago—they say he never goes out in the daytime—and I'm sure I was almost frightened at his dark angry-looking face. I shouldn't have known him, for I remember him such a good-looking free-spoken man; and I wished him good-evening, but he never answered a word, or gave me

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so much as a civil nod—only stared at me in a wild kind of way as if I'd been a mile off.'

'A bad account, Miss Bond. I fear this Mr. Redmayne must be in a bad way. But what can be the cause of it? If not money troubles, what kind of troubles?'

'You're a stranger here, or you'd know pretty well as much as I do,' answered Miss Bond, still twirling her key, but with a gossip's growing interest in the discussion of other people's business; 'yet you spoke just now as if you knew all about Brierwood and Mr. Redmayne.'

'Yes, yes, I know a good deal about him, but not all his family affairs,' said Weston rather impatiently. 'How about this trouble—what was it?'

'His daughter,' answered the girl tersely.

'His daughter?'

'Yes, an only daughter, which he doated on the very ground she walked upon; and while he was away in Australia, she died.'

'Hard lines,' said Weston, in his practical way, 'but a fate to which all men's daughters are more or less liable. Is that all?'

'She died,' repeated Jane Bond, with wide solemn eyes—'died awful sudden!'

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'Made away with herself?' inquired Weston, with keener interest.

'No, I don't suppose it was quite as bad as that, though nobody I know of can say for certain. The Redmaynes have been so uncommon close about it. She went away—'

'O, she died away from home, then?'

'Yes, went away, and no one ever heard where she went or why she went, and no one heard for ever so long after that she was dead, and no one ever heard where she died, or who she was with when she died. It was nobody's business, of course, but her father's and her friends'; but still people will talk, you know, and when other people are not free-spoken and above-board, it makes one think there's something in the background.'

'Something in the background!' repeated Weston; 'no doubt there was something in the background. A lover, for instance. Did you ever hear of any lover?'

'Never. There wasn't a quieter girl than Miss Redmayne; she went to school at the Wells, and was brought up quite the lady. No, I never heard of any one. There was a gentleman lodged there, I believe, the summer before Miss Redmayne died, but I never heard a word about him and her.'

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'Do you remember the gentleman's name?'

'No. I heard it at the time, I daresay, but if I did, I've clean forgotten it.'

'Did you ever see him?'

'Never.'

'Humph,' muttered Weston thoughtfully, 'and the girl died away from home. But you don't know where?'

'Not for certain. I fancy I've heard say she went to London, but Mrs. James Redmayne—that's Richard Redmayne's brother's wife—was always very snip-snappish about it.'

'Did they bring the daughter home to be buried?'

'O dear, no. She'd been dead ever so long before anybody knew anything about it except her own people, even if *they* knew.'

'How do you know that she really is dead?' said Weston in a speculative tone. 'She may have run away with some one—gone wrong, as you call it in the country—and her family might prefer to tell this story about her death rather than confess the truth.'

This suggestion of a small social mystery was not unpleasing to Jane Bond. She shook her head and sighed with a solemn air that might mean any thing.

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'There's no knowing what may be at the bottom of it,' she said, after a pause. 'Miss Redmayne's mother died young, and died sudden, but still there's no knowing. I've heard say, from those that knew him well, that Richard Redmayne was always a proud man, though he was so free-spoken. And everybody knew how he loved his daughter. If anything went wrong with her, he'd be sure to take it deeply to heart.'

'Naturally, and would be likely to invent the story of her death in order to shield her. Depend upon it, Miss Redmayne is as much alive as you or I, and living very comfortably somewhere. In some snug little box St.-John's-wood way, very likely,' he added, to himself rather than to Miss Bond; 'I'd give a year's income to find her.'

He looked at his watch again, and this time wished Miss Bond good-morning. She opened the new iron gate, and he went through on to the dusty road. He had spent a good deal of his morning's leisure, but he had spent it profitably. It was hardly likely that any one would be able to tell him much more about the Redmayne household than he had just heard from Jane Bond.

'I knew there was something,' he said to himself

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as he walked along the road in a triumphant spirit; 'I could have wagered my existence there was something. I saw it in Harcross's face the evening after the wedding, when Augusta talked of Brierwood. He's an excellent actor, but he couldn't deceive me. And this was at the bottom of his disinclination to come to Clevedon. *That* confirmed my idea. The girl died away from home—a very easy way of settling for her and making an end of the story. These country clodhoppers are as proud as Lucifer, and would tell any lie rather than bear the burden of disgrace. I wouldn't mind backing my own opinion that Miss Redmayne is comfortably hidden away in some dainty little retreat within the four-mile radius, and that Walgrave Harcross pays the rent and taxes; and if my idea is a sound one, it shall go hard with me if I don't unearth the lady.'

He walked on to Brierwood, surveyed the picturesque old farmhouse, peered in at the garden-gate, stared at the windows, but could perceive no token of life within except the slender thread of smoke curling up from the chimney at the inferior end of the building. After the account he had just heard of Mr. Redmayne he was not at all inclined to beard that wounded lion in his den, so he found a humble

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roadside inn within about a quarter of a mile, where he asked for a bottle of soda-water with a glass of sherry in it, and while sipping that compound and recognising that peculiar flavour of publican's sherry, which is at once hot and sweet and sour, he contrived to make a few inquiries about Mr. Redmayne and his belongings.

The innkeeper was less communicative than Miss Bond, and was evidently disinclined to talk about Richard Redmayne's troubles or Richard Redmayne's daughter.

'Yes, there was a daughter,' he said, in answer to Weston's cross-questioning; 'and she died, and poor Redmayne took it to heart, and has never been the same man since. He went to Australia, and made money at the diggings, and bought a farm out there, and sent his brother's family over to work it for him; and he's let off his land here, and does nothing all day but sit in the garden and smoke, I'm told. All I know is, that he never comes nigh me, and he used to drop in pretty often in a friendly way, though he was never a drinking man.'

That was about as much as Mr. Vallory could obtain for the price of his undrinkable soda-and-sherry; but so far as it went, it served to confirm the story

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Jane Bond had told him. He turned his face homewards, refreshed in body and mind by his healthy morning walk and the crumbs of information gathered on the road, and his bosom filled with that serene consciousness of having improved the shining hour which may be supposed to have cheered and sustained the busy bee.

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CHAPTER IV.

'THINK YOU, I AM NO STRONGER THAN MY SEX?'

CLEVEDON HALL and Clevedon Chase lost all their pleasantness in the eyes of Mrs. Harcross after that confession of her husband's. She was not a woman to envy the advantages of another, had never in her life felt so mean an anguish; but it did not the less seem to her that this noble old mansion and all its belongings should by right have been Hubert's, and that it was a bitter thing to see him a guest in the house where he ought to have been master. Since that revelation in the picture gallery, she had thought of nothing else, and it had been very difficult for her to contribute her quota to the common fund of liveliness and society talk. Weston's observant eye had detected the change, and he would have been very glad to know the nature of the disturbing influence. Had Augusta's suspicions been aroused by the circumstances that had awakened his? Did she begin to doubt her husband's entire devotion to herself?

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Was she in a temper in which it would be safe to hint his own doubts upon that subject? He did not forget the conversation at the dinner-table, on the first night at Clevedon, and how Augusta had risen in the might of her wifely affection, like the lioness who defends her young. Prudence was ever his guiding star, so he held his peace for a time, and looked about him.

'I don't want to be premature,' he said to himself. 'It would be a mistake to approach the subject till I've got a case. And if I keep quiet and look about me, I'm pretty sure to find out something more; and when I do drop down upon you, Mr. Walgrave Harcross, I mean the drop to be a crusher.'

What was his motive? A mixed one. In the first place, he never had forgiven, and he never meant to forgive, Hubert Harcross for having come between him and his cousin; and in the second place —perhaps he himself could hardly have given a clear statement of his secondary motive. He knew that he wanted — in his own words — to 'square accounts' with his rival, and he knew that, beyond that settlement in the immediate present, he had views for the future—views which he did not care to put into any definite shape just yet, but which were, nevertheless,

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interwoven with the whole scheme of his life. He had sown his wild oats, had made an end of the frivolities of youth, and could afford to concentrate all his thoughts and desires upon this one purpose.

The driving, and riding, and picnicking, and croquet-playing, and afternoon tea-drinking in the old-fashioned garden, went on just the same, after that one rainy day, and Mrs. Harcross performed her part in all these diversions, despite those corroding thoughts which were now ever present with her. She might have pleaded headache or fatigue, or long arrears of correspondence, and shut herself in her own room, there to brood over her misery unseen by human eyes, except the eyes of Tullion. But to do this, she argued with herself, would be to set people wondering; and, with that strange likeness between Sir Francis Clevedon and Hubert Harcross always before them, who could tell whether some observer, more acute than the common herd, might not fathom that shameful secret? No, she would face the world, and defy suspicion, if, indeed, the secret were still safe—a question upon which she sometimes suffered excruciating doubts.

Had she no pity for her husband, the primary victim, who for no fault of his own stood thus di-

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vided from his fellow men, with a cruel blot upon his name? She did pity him, but in so much less a degree than she pitied herself for having unwittingly linked herself with his dishonour, that her compassion had not much weight. She could not forgive him for having married her on false pretences, for having withheld a secret that would have unquestionably prevented her acceptance of him.

'If I had loved him to distraction,' she told herself, 'I would have broken my heart rather than I would have married him, knowing what I know now.'

She felt angry with her father even for the carelessness which had exposed her to such a calamity.

'To think of papa, a lawyer, with his wide experience, taking no pains to find out my husband's actual pedigree.'

Mrs. Harcross forgot the very resolute tone she had taken about this marriage, which had made Mr. Vallory somewhat diffident in the matter of interference or opposition. It seemed a hard thing that she, who was, as it were, the very nursling of the law, should have been thus cheated—that all the parchment and legal stationery in the offices of Harcross and Vallory could not save her from this degradation.

'If I were quite sure that no one knew!' she said

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to herself. 'But, then, how can I tell? How can I suppose that Lord Dartmoor kept his own counsel?'

The windows of her bedroom and dressing-room looked over the noblest part of the park, and the prospect, which had been agreeable enough at first, now filled her with unspeakable bitterness. It was his, perhaps, Hubert's; by right and justice his very own. Who could tell that there had not been a marriage, and a legal one? O, foolish wretched mother, to leave her son's rights unasserted, undefended!

Even Georgina Clevedon suffered a little in Augusta's estimation. She could not feel quite so fond of her as she had been before. She was always asking herself—'Which is the interloper, she or I?'

Between the husband and wife there had been no farther quarrel; only a terrible calm, like a dull dead sunless stillness upon a cold gray sea. Hubert Harcross was deeply wounded. Even in that loveless marriage, loveless at least on one side, there had been some kind of bond. He had been grateful for his wife's preference, had admired her and been proud of her; had even, in his better moods, looked forward to a day when years of peaceful association should have brought them a little closer together, should have developed some mutual sympathies, some

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common thoughts and aspirations. But that was all over now. She had outraged his pride, stung him as he had never been stung before by man or woman. He shut her out of his heart. To the end of his existence she must remain a stranger to him, or something worse than a stranger—an enemy who had offended him beyond the possibility of forgiveness.

Augusta hardly realised the nature of the breach between them. Absorbed for the time in her own feelings, she had not yet attempted to analyse those of her husband. She could see that he was offended, but she took no trouble to conciliate him. It seemed, indeed, a hard thing that he should take umbrage at her natural indignation. He had cheated her, and was offended because she resented the wrong he had done. She was one of those people who can sustain this kind of silent warfare, and who are never the first to hang out the flag of truce. So long as the proprieties were not outraged, she was content. Before the eyes of the world, Mr. Harcross was still polite and attentive to his wife. In the seclusion of their own rooms, they scarcely spoke to each other.

While these who had once sworn eternal love and obedience were thus dragging a lengthening chain, Georgie Clevedon was tasting all the sweets of early

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married life; that balmy spring-time of existence in which the days are all sunshine and soft west wind, and all the trees of the garden in blossom; that glimpse of Eden and man before the fall.

'We have been married more than three months and have not quarrelled yet, Frank,' she said to her husband one morning, in a little burst of child-like happiness. 'Do you think we ever *could* quarrel?'

'Of course not, darling. Can a man quarrel with the better part of himself, the brighter half of his own nature?'

'Yet one hears so often of domestic unhappiness,' said Georgie, with a sudden thoughtfulness; 'and I suppose people always begin by loving each other as well as you and I do. I mean to say that mercenary marriages, or marriages of convenience, must be the exception, and not the rule. And yet so few people seem really happy, as you and I are. There are the Harcrosses, for instance: that *must* have been a love match, for Augusta had a fortune, and Mr. Harcross hadn't; so on her side at least it must have been a love match. But they seem such an uncomfortable couple; very polite to each other, and so on, but seeming to live only for the world.'

'Why, you wouldn't have them billing and cooing

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in our style, Georgie!' cried Sir Francis, laughing. 'It's a long time since their honeymoon, remember; and then you can hardly expect a popular barrister to go in for that sort of thing. He has too much sentiment in his breach-of-promise cases. Besides Harcross, though a very good fellow, seems of rather too hard a composition for a lover. I couldn't imagine Harcross in love.'

'Don't say that, Frank, when people say he's like you.'

'Physically, perhaps. But you see we are not obliged to resemble each other morally. He is a man who worships success, Georgie; no woman need expect to stand for much in the life of such a man. His wife must be satisfied if he wins her a title some day.'

'I daresay Augusta would think more of that,' said Georgie. 'I like her very much, you know; but I can't help seeing that she is rather worldly.'

Of course this devoted young couple could not have much time to themselves while their house was full of company. They were obliged to be perpetually planning new diversions, fresh drives, and rides, and ruins, and show-houses for their friends; to be continually on the watch to prevent the demon of dulness

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stealing into the circle. They succeeded very well in the performance of these duties, and though they often told each other in confidence that Clevedon was much nicer when they had it all to themselves, and that they should be glad when the people were gone, they contrived nevertheless to enjoy life, and to bring very gay spirits to every fresh amusement. To Georgie all the importance and grandeur of her position as châtelaine seemed very much like playing at keeping house. It was so new to reign over a larger kingdom than that in which Pedro the monkey, and Tufto the deerhound, and Kitmutgar the bull-terrier, and Sicee the pug, were her chief subjects; so new to have servants who would scarcely lift their eyes to behold her countenance, instead of the fat familiar cook with whom her father had been wont to hold long conversations, of a culinary nature, through the kitchen window.

'I feel myself such an impostor, Franky,' she said to her husband, 'when Mrs. Mixer asks me if I have any alteration to make in the bill of fare, and I can only think of papa's favourite dishes—curried prawns, and devilled kidneys, and mulligatawny soup.'

The great event of the year was to be the fête on Sir Francis Clevedon's birthday. The whole affair

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had been Georgie's scheme from first to last, and Sir Francis had been not a little reluctant to be made an object of interest in the eyes of his tenantry.

'It seems so absurd, Georgie,' he had remonstrated, more than once, 'for a man of nine-and-twenty to keep his birthday.'

'Nonsense, Frank! Didn't George the Third have a jubilee when he was ever so old? And this is to be your first birthday at Clevedon. It is your coming of age, in fact; for you never did come of age, or only in a sneaking way at Bruges, or some other horrid Flemish town, where all the streets smell of garlic. If you don't want to keep your birthday, I shall begin to think you are not at all glad you married me, and that you are afraid to show your tenants the sort of wife you have chosen.'

Of course the lady had her own way, and, having once secured her husband's consent to the business, did not rest till she had obtained *carte blanche* as to details. Then did Colonel Davenant arise in his glory. He drove over to Clevedon every morning to breakfast, and from morn till dewy eve he and his daughter were more or less occupied with mysterious consultations and discussions about the fête. Strange men came down from town to take orders about lamps

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and marquees, and temporary fountains which were to gush forth in the midst of roses. Other strange men hung about the park with a view to fireworks.

Sir Francis shivered as he thought how much all this would cost him, and what John Wort would say to his extravagance. Would not that faithful steward declare, with some appearance of justification, that he was going the way of his father?

There was to be a dinner for the tenantry in one monster marquee, a dinner for the villagers from twenty miles round in two other tents, including every ploughboy who ploughed Sir Francis Clevedon's land, every crowboy who scared the rooks from the newly-sown corn; and in the afternoon and early evening there was to be dancing upon a broad expanse of level greensward in the park, where the depredations of Sir Lucas among his ancestral oaks had left a fine lawn. Later in the evening there was to be dancing for the 'quality' in the great dining-hall, which was to become a very garden of roses and exotics. Colonel Davenant's ideas were of Eastern splendour.

'We want golden tissue hangings for the doorways, and some dancing girls to perform an interlude when the people are tired, Georgie,' he said, with

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a desponding air; 'there's so little to be done in England.'

It was at the Colonel's suggestion that Lady Clevedon organised a band of honorary stewards, who were to wear her insignia, a moss rosebud and a knot of blue satin ribbon, and were to provide for the comfort and amusement of the guests, gentle and simple. This onerous office was assigned to all those gentlemen staying in the house, and Mr. Harcross found himself pledged to preside at one of the tables in the villagers' marquee, and to circulate all day with a bunch of blue ribbon at his button-hole. He accepted the charge meekly, and promised to do his duty, in quite a Nelsonian spirit.

'"For England, Home, and Beauty,"' he said. 'I hope the Kentish damsels are pretty, Lady Clevedon.'

The careless empty words were scarce spoken, when a little pang shot through his heart. So much that a man says in society is purely mechanical; but no sooner was that speech uttered than he bethought himself of one gentle maiden who might have been all the world to him, had he so chosen.

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CHAPTER V.

'A NATIVE SKILL HER SIMPLE ROBES EXPRESS'D.'

IT was the eve of the birthday fête, a sultry afternoon with the thermometer at 80° in the shade, and not a leaf stirring in Clevedon Park. Jane Bond gave a little impatient sigh every now and then, as she sat at work in an arbour sheltered with hop-vines, and comfortably placed in a corner of the trim little garden belonging to the south lodge; a sigh which was caused partly by the heat of the weather, and partly by a natural anxiety upon the subject of her needlework.

She was making her dress for to-morrow's festival, and having only decided at the last moment that she would have a new and brilliant pink muslin, instead of a lavender garment of the same fabric, which had been her 'Sunday frock' last summer, Miss Bond was working against time. Her decision had been in some manner influenced by the present of a sovereign from Weston Vallory, ostensibly to buy a neck-ribbon.

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'I know you are fond of pretty colours,' he said, 'and I want you to buy the brightest ribbon in Tunbridge. Men have no taste in these matters, or I should have chosen it for you myself.'

It was not often that Miss Bond was gratified by the gift of a sovereign, though her father was reputed to have saved money, and to be better off than most of his class. Of course, if he had been in the habit of giving his daughter casual sovereigns, he would have been less able to carry small sums to the savings-bank. Jane was clad comfortably, but soberly, as became the daughter of a God-fearing Primitive Methodist, and her father chose her gowns himself for the most part, so that she should not offend the eye of the elect by gaudy colours or eccentric patterns. In neat spots and narrow stripes, in lavenders and duns and grays, Miss Bond was obliged to walk this earth, as contentedly or discontentedly as she pleased. She kept her father's house for him, and every Saturday evening had to render up a strict account of the past week's expenses. There was more money spent upon starch than Joshua Bond approved; but if he complained of this item, he was always informed that his Sunday's white shirt was the chief cause of the expense.

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'I think it's your sticking-out gowns, Jane,' the gardener would reply sternly; 'two pounds of starch in a week! It's downright sinful.'

Sometimes when Miss Bond's accounts had been particularly accurate, no odd fourpence-farthing or twopence-halfpenny deficient, and when the expenditure had been unusually light, Joshua would relax his grip upon the balance so far as to present his daughter with a stray shilling.

'Put it in your money-box, Jane,' he said; 'you've got a money-box, I suppose?'

'Yes, father,' Miss Bond replied promptly, mindful of a long disused and disabled cardboard institution, with tiny glass windows, lurking somewhere on the inaccessible top shelf of an upstairs cupboard. 'O, yes, father, I've got a box.'

Thus it was that on receiving Mr. Vallory's present—Weston had found occasion to go in and out by the south gate several times since his first encounter with the gardener's daughter—thus it was that Miss Bond, with her admirer's sovereign in her pocket, could venture to prefer a request to her father.

'You wouldn't mind my wearing bright colours for once in a way, would you, father?' she inquired in a pleading tone, when he had lighted his evening

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pipe, after an especially comfortable meat-tea. 'I should look such a dowdy among all the other girls in that wishy-washy lavender thing you bought me last summer. It doesn't take the starch well, you know, and—'

'Doesn't take the starch!' cried the aggrieved parent. 'I should like to know what material would take as much starch as you use; I sometimes think you must give it to the fowls.'

'O, father, what a shame to say that, when I take such pains with your collars and things! How would you like your Sunday shirt to be limp and crumpled?'

'My shirt—two pounds of starch a week for my shirt!'

'Don't be cross, father, or I shall be obliged to go out to service and work for somebody else. I should get wages then, and could use as much starch as I liked, and you'd have to keep a servant, and pay her for doing what I do,' said Miss Bond, in whose breast rebellious fires were always lurking, ready to blaze up at the first provocation. 'There's not many girls of my age—'

'Girls of your age! I should call you a woman!' growled her father.

'There's not many young women would put up

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with being kept as close as I'm kept,' continued Miss Bond recklessly. 'Howsomedever, I don't want to complain. But as I've saved a few shillings, that you've given me now and then, I suppose you'll make no objection to my buying a pink muslin for the "feat."'

'Buy what you like,' said the father with a groan, 'as long as it isn't out of my money. If your own sense won't teach you what's proper for a young woman in that state of life to which it has pleased God to call you, *I* can't teach you. Make yourself a merry-andrew if you like.'

'A merry fiddlestick!' exclaimed Miss Bond. 'I don't see why the wicked people should have all the pretty colours.'

So having wrung this unwilling consent from her father, Jane Bond had walked to Tunbridge Wells in the early morning, and had arrived at her favourite draper's shop just as the shutters were being taken down. Here she purchased as many yards of bright pink-and-white muslin as could be bought for a sovereign, for her ideas on the subject of flouncings and pleatings were almost as extensive as a West-end milliner's. She sat in her arbour this afternoon with a pile of neatly-folded muslin frilling upon the table

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before her, and plied her needle with almost feverish haste, cheered by thoughts of coming triumphs.

How they would all stare at her pink dress, made in a style which she had copied from a morning dress of Lady Clevedon's—a costume devised by the great Bouffante herself! There was Mary Mason, the laundry maid—between whom and Jane Bond there was a tacit rivalry — who was going to wear a new brown alpaca, much bedecked with braid and buttons, but a very vulgar and commonplace garment compared with that enchanting muslin.

'I wonder what *he'll* think of it,' Jane said to herself, as she began to turn down an almost endless hem; and the *he* who occupied so important a place in her thoughts was not her affianced husband, Joseph Flood, but her new admirer, Weston Vallory.

The latch of the garden gate fell with a little clicking sound, while she sat working in the western sunshine. The muslin flounce dropped from her busy hands, and she looked up eagerly with a sudden deepening of her rosy cheeks. But the person who had lifted the latch was not the person she had been thinking about; and she took up the flounce again with rather an impatient twitch, and went on folding the hem. Her visitor was only Joseph Flood. She

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had no right to expect any one else, since it was not Mr. Vallory's habit to open the garden gate. A flirtation with a rustic beauty was pleasant enough; but Weston had too much respect for his own reputation to run the risk of being seen loafing in the lodge garden, in sentimental converse with the gardener's daughter. A little dawdling talk by the park gate, which could be cut short at a moment's warning, was the utmost indulgence he permitted himself.

Miss Bond, however, who could not estimate the extent of her admirer's prudence, and who had no small idea of her own attractions, may have nursed some vague hope of his dropping in unexpectedly this summer evening before the eight-o'clock dinner, to while away half an hour in her society. And, lo, instead of the London dandy, in his faultless boots and wonderful waistcoat, here was only honest Joseph Flood, whose highest merit was to love her to distraction, and whose powers of expression were of the poorest. She went on folding and pinching the muslin, with the bold black eyes cast down and a somewhat sulky look in the full red lips, while Joe came shambling towards the arbour, using his long legs as if they were an embarrassment to him in the absence of his horse.

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Greetings are usually dispensed with in this class of life; so the groom hardly noticed the coldness of his reception, and dropped down upon the bench by his mistress's side without a word, put his stalwart arm round her waist, and administered the privileged kiss of an affianced husband. Jane drew herself away from him with an impatient shrug.

'I wish you wouldn't be so tiresome, Joseph,' she said peevishly. 'I'm sure the weather's too hot for kissing, and I don't believe you've shaved this morning.'

'Ah, but I have, though; I suppose one's beard grows faster this weather.'

'Your chin does scrub so; I'd as lief have a bit of emery paper rubbed across my face. Don't squeeze so close to me, Joe; there's room enough on the bench without that. I've got all those flounces to hem and put on the skirt before I go to bed to-night.'

'O, it's a new gown, is it, that there's all this fuss about?' said Joseph, contemplating the pink frills with a contemptuous air; 'then all I can say is, if you're going to be so ill-tempered every time you get a new gown, I hope you won't have many of 'em when we're married.'

'It's just like you to say that, Joseph,' replied

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Miss Bond, in a lofty tone; 'now if you were a gentleman, you'd take an interest in my dresses, and think nothing too good for me.'

'But I ain't a gentleman, you see, and if you're to lose your temper with me for the sake of a parcel of fal-lals like that there, I'd rather see you dressed anyhow than decked out as fine as a peacock.'

Miss Bond tossed her head and went on with her work assiduously. It was not the first time she had seen Joseph Flood since her acquaintance with Mr. Vallory, and in the course of previous interviews she had favoured him with vague hints of being admired and appreciated by people of higher capacity to admire and appreciate than he possessed, and with ampler resources wherewith to back their opinions. Joseph was of a jealous nature, and had been quick to resent these remarks.

'It doesn't much matter whether you like my dress or not, that's one comfort,' the girl said presently; 'there's more people in the world besides you, and I daresay there'll be some at the "feat" tomorrow that *will* admire me.'

'I suppose you mean a pack of fine gentlemen,' replied Joseph sullenly; 'no prudent girl wants their admiration.'

'Then I'm afraid I'm not a prudent girl,' re-

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marked Jane, with a little affected giggle; 'for I do like to be admired, and I set more store upon a gentleman's admiration than a common man's.'

'I'm sorry for you then, Jane Bond,' said the lover sternly; 'for if that's true, you'll never make a good wife to an honest working man. But I don't believe it is true. You're always up to some blessed game of this kind, trying to take a rise out of me. And yet you know there never was a young man fonder of a young woman than I am of you. But I'm not the sort of man to stand any nonsense.'

This kind of protestation was gratifying to Miss Bond's vanity, and she was somewhat mollified by it, and even allowed the arm of her legitimate lover to steal around her waist and remain there placidly while she stitched her flounces; but throughout that evening the talk between the affianced ones was of a skirmishing character, and Jane Bond indulged in numerous suggestive remarks, all tending to show how much brighter and better her lot in life might have been, had she so pleased, than Mr. Flood the groom could possibly make it. She was all good temper and high spirits, however, for the rest of the evening, pleased with the effect of her dress as it proceeded towards completion. She insisted on Mr. Flood staying to supper, and cut him the most delicate slices of cold boiled bacon, and

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graciously compounded a glass of gin-and-water for him at her father's behest; but notwithstanding these civilities, Joseph Flood left the south lodge in a savage humour, and bent his steps towards his bed-chamber over the stables meditating vengeance, convinced that Jane Bond meant to fool him.

'She's just the kind of woman to do it,' he thought; 'she knows she's the prettiest girl within twenty mile—ay, within fifty mile, I'll warrant—and she takes advantage of it. I'll be bound some of those London dandies have been talking their nonsense to her—the Captain, perhaps; there's nothing like a soldier for that sort of mischief. But if she does try to make a fool of me, I'll be even with her, and I'll be even with the man that comes between us.'

He was a determined young fellow, this Joseph Flood; a muscular Christian, with more muscularity than Christianity, and in this one matter of his attachment to Jane Bond his sentiments were of a somewhat desperate character. She had played her fish a considerable time before she netted him, holding him at arm's-length, pretending to be quite indifferent to him one day, delighting him by her amiability the next, and appearing absolutely to detest him the day after that. These alternate hot and cold douches, these alternations of despair and delight, had the

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intended effect. A prize so hard to win seemed to Mr. Flood the one crowning reward of man's endeavours. He wooed the gardener's daughter with a boundless patience. It was only when she did at last consent to pledge herself to him, declaring that she had been bothered into saying yes, that Mr. Flood assumed a more independent tone, treating the lady henceforward as his own peculiar property rather than as a divinity to whom he was bound to pay continual worship.

This independent manner of his, this unpleasant way of taking everything for granted, was particularly provoking to Jane Bond, who had an insatiable appetite for flattery. She did not rest until she had found out her lover's weak point, and that she could torture him into savage fits of jealousy. Having discovered this power, she used it rather frequently, and their walks to and from chapel were apt to be spent in silent sulkiness or open quarrelling. Yet the young man clung to her, and went on loving her, and looked forward to the day when she was to be his wife.

'If you was to play me a trick, Jenny; if you was to jilt me and marry another fellow, I think I should be tempted to murder you,' he said to her one day, during the first moments of reconciliation after an unusually angry quarrel.

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'Wouldn't it be wiser to murder the other fellow?' Miss Bond asked, laughing.

'Perhaps I might do both,' answered Joseph Flood, in a tone that was sufficiently serious to alarm his betrothed.

She clung to his arm quite affectionately, more gratified by this threat than by any compliment he'd ever paid her.

'I do think you're fond of me, Joseph,' she said; 'and I don't believe there's any love worth having without jealousy. As for playing you any tricks, there's no fear of that. But I can't help wishing sometimes that we were both better off than we are. I think I'd rather die than look forward to being such a drudge as most of the women I know come to after marriage.'

'There's no call for you to be a drudge, Jenny. You can be as smart after marriage as you are now. It's only slovens that come to be drudges.'

'Ah, you don't know. Men never understand how much work a woman has to do. You'd want your victuals cooked and your clothes washed, just as father does; and if there was children, there'd be them to do for, and the shop to look after too, when you was out of the way.'

'I thought you'd like the notion of the shop,

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Jane,' said the lover, rubbing his chin thoughtfully. In his own idea, a shop was a kind of ready-made income without work or effort. He would only have to sit behind his counter reading a newspaper, or asleep with his head against the wall, snoring peacefully in the sunshine, while the money dropped into the till.

'Yes, the shop's all very well,' answered Jane. 'I sometimes fancy I should like weighing things, and having a lot of nice little drawers full of starch, and mustard, and rice, and sago, and all that, and a little stock of fancy stationery in the window laid out tempting like, and perhaps even a few pots of bear's-grease, and sixpenny bottles of lavender-water, and neat little boxes of hair-pins. I've heard tell there's a deal of profit on them small things. But when it came to be the same from week's end to week's end, and perhaps bad debts; and after all it's hard work, like anything else—'

'Then drop the notion of the shop, Jane. *I* don't care; I can keep on in service.'

'O, no, that would never do. I couldn't marry to have my husband in service. People would say I was very hard driven to get a husband.'

'They could never think that of you, Jenny, even if they said it. But I'm blest if I know what you do

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want, if you don't want me to have the shop at Rayton that we've always talked of.'

Perhaps, had Jane been closely questioned, she herself would have found it very difficult to explain her desires. She only felt a vague and general discontent. It would be much better to keep a shop and to be an independent matron — nay, even a person of some importance — in Rayton village, than to be under her father's stern dominion in the south lodge. And yet it seemed a sorry ending of all those fine stories which had been told her by stray admirers, and by that perpetual comforter, her looking-glass. She wished she had not been so heartily tired of her father's rule, and the dulness of her life; that she could have afforded to wait a few years longer for that possible admirer looming in the future, whose advent so many of her admirers in the present had prophesied—the rich gentleman who would some day woo her for his wife. She had never read novels, and was perplexed by no sentimental foreshadowings. But she did cherish that one fond dream of a rich husband, and she did think it a hard thing that the wealthy wooer had not yet appeared, and that out of sheer weariness of spirit she must needs throw herself away upon a groom.

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CHAPTER VI.

'THEN FELL UPON THE HOUSE A SUDDEN GLOOM.'

LADY CLEVEDON'S invitations had been sent far and wide, to neighbours who were not tenants as well as to neighbours who were, and amongst other outsiders Richard Redmayne received one of the gilt-edged illuminated cards, prepared by a London lithographer from a design of Georgie's own. Colonel Davenant had insisted that even the invitation cards should be what he called 'a feature.'

Rick Redmayne, who had seemed to himself for a long time to exist outside the common joys and sorrows of mankind, put the gay-looking ticket into his breast-pocket with a brief laugh of scorn.

'As if such a thing was in my line,' he said to himself; 'but it was kind of Lady Clevedon to send it—and of course she didn't know. If Grace had been alive now—'

He could imagine himself going to the rustic festival with his daughter on his arm; could see her face as it would have looked amidst the summer holi-

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day-making ; could see the soft blue eyes brighten as they would have brightened at sight of the invitation card ; could fancy how her childish soul would have been fascinated by the gold and colour, and how she would have treasured the card in her workbox as a relic when the fête was done. With her he could have drunk the cup of simple pleasure to the dregs ; without her what could such a holiday seem to him but weariness and vexation ?

He put the invitation in his pocket, and would have thought no more of the matter had he been permitted to think his own thoughts. This liberty, however, was not allowed him : it was impossible to exist during the week before Sir Francis Clevedon's birthday and not hear of the Clevedon fête. Even he who so rarely passed the boundaries of his own narrowed home, could not escape the popular agitation. Clevedon fête was the sauce which Mrs. Bush served with every meal she set before him. It was in vain that he professed his indifference. A mind overcharged as hers was would find some vent, and as her 'goodman' was for the most part an absentee, Mr. Redmayne had the benefit of her intelligence. She could not set her foot beyond the garden, or take in a joint from the butcher, without hearing some-

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thing about the Cleveland festivities. In the morning she heard for the first time of the fireworks, and of the men who had come down from London to fix them; in the afternoon a neighbour brought her tidings of the lamps, from information received from that important functionary the village postman, who spoke with the voice of authority; lamps which were to be of divers colours, like the 'inumilations' Mrs. Bush had seen in London at her Majesty's coronation, when she was in service as nursemaid at Peckham Rye —lamps which, according to a privileged communication from the above-named postman, were to number upwards of a 'milliond.'

Richard Redmayne heard so much about the festival, that at last, like the little old woman in Southey's story of the Three Bears, he said a bad word about it.

'You shouldn't lose your temper over it, Mr. Redmayne,' Mrs. Bush exclaimed, with friendly reproof. 'What you ought to do is to go to Clevedon and enjoy yourself, like other people, for once in a way. I'm sure you've moped long enough here; and if it was ten thousand daughters you'd lost—not as I'm saying a word again Miss Gracey, which she was as sweet a young woman as ever stepped—you couldn't have took the loss more to heart than you have took

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it. But there's a time for all things, which I believe it was king Solomon hisself made the remark; leastways, I know I've heard it in Kingsbury Church, before Bush over-persuaded me into joining the Primitive Methodists; and if it wasn't Solomon it must have been David, or Nebuchadnezzar. There's a time for all things, Mr. Redmayne; and it isn't the time to mope when everybody within twenty miles is going to be happy; and even me and Bush asked, through Bush's brother being a tenant on the Clevedon estate. Mr. Wort brought me the card yesterday; not all gold and colours like yours, but a neat laylock, gilt-edged.'

Mr. Redmayne bore this remonstrance with tolerable patience, but had not the remotest idea of being influenced by it. Yet, when the much-expected morning dawned, serene and cloudless—for weather is sometimes propitious even in England; when the day grew older, and Kingsbury joy-bells rang gaily over woods and meadows, hopfields where the tender vines were climbing, cornfields where the golden wheat had ripened for the sickle, and where 'the free and happy barley was smiling on the scythe,'—Mr. Redmayne could not help feeling that this day was not quite as other days, and that it was a dismal

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thing to stand alone and wilfully aloof from all his fellow-men on such a day as this.

If the day had been wet, if a chill gray sky had lowered on Sir Francis Clevedon and all his preparations for a festival, if a drizzling incessant rain had foreboded the extinction of lamps and fireworks, Mr. Redmayne might have smoked his pipe by his desolate hearth in the old farmhouse kitchen, and laughed scornfully at the folly of his race, conjuring up a vision of sodden garments and disappointed faces, rain oozing slowly from the canvas roofs, the gay flag-bedecked tents transformed into gigantic shower-baths. But a misanthrope must have been of a very sour temper who could escape some touch of regret for his own lonely condition, some faint yearning for sympathy with his species, some feeble ghost-like renewal of old feelings, in such a golden noontide, and amidst so fair a landscape as that which lay around the home of Richard Redmayne. Several times had Mrs. Bush repeated her remonstrances, with every variety of rustic eloquence and much amplitude of speech, but to no effect. Mr. Redmayne declared most decisively that he would have no share in the day's rejoicings.

'A pretty figure I should cut amongst a pack of

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fools dancing and capering,' he cried contemptuously. 'I should seem like a ghost come from the grave.'

'Perhaps you might, if you went in that shabby old shooting-jacket as you wear Sundays and work-a-days, which is a disgrace to a gentleman as well to do as you are,' replied the plain-spoken Mrs. Bush, who seemed to think that the inhabitants of the spirit world might suffer from a want of good clothing; 'but not if you dressed yourself in some of the things you've got hoarded up in those two sea-chests of yours, o' purpose for the moths, one 'ud think, to see the way you let 'em lie there.' Now, do smarten yourself up a bit, and trim your whiskers, and all that, Mr. Redmayne, and don't be the only person within twenty miles of Clevedon to hang back from going. It looks so pinted. It looks almost as if you'd committed a murder, or somethink dreadful, and was afeard to face the light of day.'

This last argument touched him a little, indifferent as he professed to be about the world's esteem. It was not of himself he thought even in this, but of that dead girl who had made up his world. Was he quite true to her memory in holding himself thus utterly aloof from his kind? Might he not by that very act have given occasion for slanders, which

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might never have arisen but for that, or which, at any rate, might have been crushed by his putting a bold front on matters, and finding some answer for every question that could be asked about his lost girl?

'Good God!' he said to himself, strangely affected by this random shot of Mrs. Bush's, 'I may have made people think that things were worse than they really were, by my conduct.'

He brooded on this idea a good deal; but it was scarcely this which influenced him on Sir Francis Clevedon's birthday, when, about an hour and a half after the Bushes had departed, radiant in their Sunday clothes, and with faces varnished by the application of strong yellow soap, he suddenly made up his mind to follow them and share the pleasures of the day. They could be no pleasures to him. That was out of the question. But he would go among the noise and riot, and eating and drinking, and hold his own with the merriest, and let the world see that he was Rick Redmayne still, as good a man as he had been six years ago, before he sailed across the world to redeem his fortunes.

Strange how lonely the house seemed to him that summer day, when Mrs. Bush and her goodman had

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shut the door behind them, after much scudding to and fro and up and down at the last moment, in quest of forgotten trifles. It was not that he had ever affected Mrs. Bush's company, or that he had ever found her anything but an unmitigated bore. Yet no sooner was she departed than he sorely missed the clatter of her pattens, the cloop of her pails, the noise of her industrious broom sweeping assiduously in passages where there had been no footsteps to carry dirt. Dreary and empty beyond all measure seemed the old homestead, which had once been so blithe. He went in and out of the rooms without purpose, into that tabernacle of respectability the best parlour, where not so much as the position of a chair had been altered since his wedding day; where the chintz covers, which had been faded when he peered into the mystic chamber wonderingly, a baby in his mother's arms, were only a little paler and more feeble of tint to-day. Nothing could wear out in a room so seldom tenanted; it could only moulder imperceptibly with a gradual decay, like furniture in the sealed houses of some lava-buried city.

To-day that pale presence of the dead, whereby these rooms were always more or less haunted, smote him with a keener anguish than he could bear. The

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empty house was insupportable with that ghostly company.

'And yet, if she could take a palpable form and come back and smile upon me, God knows that I would welcome her fondly, even though I knew she were dead. Why cannot our dead come back to us sometimes, if only for one sweet solemn hour? Is God so hard that He will not lend them to us? O, Gracey, to have you with me for ever so brief a span, to hear from your own lips that heaven is fair and you are happy among the angels, to tell you how I have missed you! But there only comes the dull shadow, the dreary thought; no dear face, no gentle loving eyes.'

Many and many a time he had sat in the sunshine, in the moonlight, lost in a waking dream, and wondering if Heaven would ever vouchsafe him a vision, such as men saw of old, when angelic creatures and the spirits of the dead seemed nearer this earth than they are to-day. Many a time he had wished that the impalpable air would thicken and shape itself into the form he loved; but the vision never came. The rooms were haunted, but it was with bitter thoughts of the past; his sleep was broken, but only with confused patches of dreaming,

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in which the image of the beloved dead was entangled in some web of foolishness and bewilderment. Never had she appeared to him as he would have her come, serene and radiant with the radiance of a soul that wanders down from heaven to comfort an earthly mourner.

He went out into the garden and smoked a pipe under the cedar, but here too the solitude which had been the habit of his life lately seemed strangely intensified to-day. It might have been that sound of distant joy-bells, or the knowledge that all the little world within a twenty-mile radius was making merry so near him. It would be difficult to define the cause, but a sense of isolation crept into his mind. He smoked a second pipe, and drank a tumbler of spirit-and-water, that perilous restorer to which he had too frequent recourse of late; sat for an hour or more under the low-spreading branches which scarcely cleared his head when he stood upright, and then could endure this oppression of silence and loneliness no longer, and resolved to go to the Clevedon festival.

'I needn't join their tomfoolery,' he said to himself; 'I can look on.'

He went up to his room, and dressed himself in some of those clothes which had lain so long idle in

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his sea-chest. He was a handsome man even now, in spite of the gloomy look that had become his natural expression; a fine-looking man still, in spite of his bent shoulders; but he was only the wreck of the man he had been before his daughter's death; only the wreck of that man who sailed home from the distant world, fortunate and full of hope, coming back to his only child.

The dinner for the cottagers, farm-servants, gardeners, gamekeepers, and small fry of all kinds was to begin at half-past one; the dinner for the superior tenantry, to which Mr. Redmayne was bidden, at three o'clock. He had plenty of time to walk to Clevedon before the banquet began, if he cared to take his place among the revellers, but he did not care about the ceremony of dining. He meant only to stroll about the park, take a distant view of the rejoicings, and walk home again in the twilight. The Bushes did not expect to return till midnight, as the fireworks, which were the great feature of the entertainment, were only to begin at ten; but Richard Redmayne had no idea of staying to stare at many-coloured sky-rockets, or showers of falling stars, or catherine wheels, or roman candles.

He took the short cut to Clevedon, the path that

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skirted meadows and cornfields, by those tall hedgerows which had sheltered Grace and her lover in the fatal summer that was gone. Slowly and listlessly he went his way, stopping to lean against a stile and smoke a meditative pipe before his journey was half done; lingering to look at the ripened corn sometimes, with the critical eye of experience, but not with the keen interest of possession. Even if these acres had still been 'in hand,' it is doubtful whether he would have surveyed them with his old earnestness. The very key-stone of life's arch was gone. He had no motive for wishing to increase his store; hardly any motive for living, except that one undefined idea of a day of reckoning to come sooner or later betwixt him and his child's destroyer.

To-day, dawdling in the sunshine, amidst that peaceful landscape, going on such a purposeless errand, hardly knowing why he went, there was surely nothing farther from his thoughts than that the day of reckoning had come.

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CHAPTER VII.

'OF ALL MEN ELSE I HAVE AVOIDED THEE.'

PERHAPS, if a man must throw his money away somehow or other, which appears to be almost an absolute condition in the lives of most men, there is no pleasanter mode of scattering it than upon such a rustic carnival as Georgie Clevedon and her father had organised for the celebration of the baronet's twenty-ninth birthday. In that cup of pleasure one would suppose there can be scarcely one bitter drop, provided always that everybody within a certain distance is invited; that there is no forgotten fairy to mutter her maledictions in the midst of the banquet, and invoke misfortune upon the prince or princess of the house. And yet who can tell, even in that simple world, what heart-burnings may disturb the joy of Susan Jones at sight of Mary Smith's new gown, what a sense of humiliation may depress Mrs. Brown on beholding Mrs. Robinson in a new bonnet,

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while Brown's scanty wage has not afforded his partner so much as a yard of ribbon to smarten her faded head-gear? Or who shall presume to say that the jealous pangs which gnaw the entrails of some rustic Strephon at sight of his Chloe's flirtation with Damon are not as fierce an agony as the torments of any brilliant dandy in the Household Brigade distracted by the infidelities of a countess?

Sir Francis Clevedon did not consider the thing so deeply as he looked out on the tents and flags and flowers and fountains and gaily-dressed crowd scattered over a vast green amphitheatre under the noontide sun—a cheerful picture framed by a background of old forest trees, amidst whose cool umbrage the scared deer had fled for sanctuary. He thought that Georgie had hit upon a very pleasant manner of fooling away two or three hundred pounds, whatever Mr. Wort—with a pencil behind his ear and an ancient little account-book in his hand—might say to the contrary.

'You're sure you're pleased, then, Frankie?' says Georgie, in her little coaxing way, sidling up to her husband as she stands by him on the terrace-walk before the house, looking down at the crowd. 'I should be quite miserable if you didn't like it all. You see, it seems such a dreadful thing for you to

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marry a girl without sixpence, and for her to begin by spending your money at such a rate; but, then, it's only once a year, and it's all for your sake, so I do hope you're pleased.'

'As if I could help being pleased with you in that bonnet,' said Frank, surveying the bright face framed in white azaleas and blonde. Georgie is all in white to-day, an airy sylph-like costume, in which she looks scarcely seventeen. Sibyl is near her, also in white, dotted about with little bouquets of forget-me-nots, and with forget-me-nots in her bonnet; and Sibyl is very agreeably occupied in a flirtation with her brother's friend, Captain Harwood of the Engineers. The Clevedon guests from outside have not yet begun to arrive; the visitors in the house circulate languidly—looking out of windows, or sauntering up and down the terrace, watching that crowd of creatures of an inferior order from afar, with a kind of mildly curious interest which one might feel about common objects by the sea-shore, and with hardly any more sense of affinity than one has with a jelly-fish or any other invertebrate animal.

'I am so glad they have a nice day, poor dear things,' said Mrs. Cheviot, who was good-natured, but not of the district-visiting order, and who had no personal acquaintance with these helots.

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'Yes,' drawled Weston, 'I suppose we ought to be pleased for their sakes; but it would have been more fun to see them struggling in the rain with umbrellas. I was at York summer meeting the year that Moor-hen was expected to win, but didn't; and the rain was incessant, and I can assure you the people on the shilling stands and places were very good fun. I think we should have had more amusement to-day if the weather had been bad; to see the girls dancing in pattens, for instance—a *pas de pattens*—would have been capital.

'I suppose that's what they mean by a patten fair?' said the youngest Miss Stalman; 'because it always rains in Ireland, you know.'

Mrs. Harcross sat in a garden-chair near this group, and looked listlessly at the people in the park, sauntering to and fro to the music of a local brass band braying out the march from Gounod's *Faust* in abominable time, with a kind of staggering sound, as if a regiment of gigantic toy-soldiers were lifting their clumsy wooden legs to the music. There was a good deal of talk and merriment already among the rural visitors. An Aunt Sally had been set up under the trees, and the lads of the village were pelting the grim old lady's visage; but every one felt that dinner was to be the first great event of the day,

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and that everything before dinner was merely preliminary and unimportant. The tenants, whose appetites had been sharpened by a longish drive through the morning air, were rather inclined to envy the peasantry their earlier meal; but, then, there was a satisfaction in knowing that their banquet would be a joy in the present when the plebeian feast was only a memory of the past.

Very bitter were the thoughts of Augusta Harcross as she looked across that festive crowd—the tenants and retainers who should have been the tenants and retainers of her husband. She did not grudge Sir Francis Clevedon the cheap popularity of to-day; indeed, she considered the whole business a foolish and frivolous waste of money. Not such renown as might be won by hogsheads of ale and roasted oxen did she desire for her husband, nor would she have valued the commonplace distinction of a Lady Bountiful for herself. She thought of what Hubert might have made of these advantages which Sir Francis held to so little purpose. She thought of him not wasting his powers upon the dryasdust arguments of law-courts or committee-rooms, but mounting that splendid ladder of statesmanship whereby a man achieves that renown which must

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ever seem the chiefest of earthly glory to the British mind. Now he spent his labour for that which profited him naught, since committee-rooms and arbitration cases, though remunerative enough in a sordid sense, were hardly on the high road to the woolsack; but with six or seven thousand a year of his own, and the status of landowner, it would have been different. Such an income, augmented by hers, would have enabled him to hold any position.

'He shall go into parliament next session,' she said to herself. 'He *shall* win a name that men will respect. I will not let myself be crushed by this horrid secret. A barrister's fame is so common. I might be proud of him, if he were to distinguish himself in the political world; I might be proud of him, in spite of what I know.'

It was a strangely blended sentiment of selfish shame and regretful affection for him. If she had loved him less, she might have felt her own wrong less bitterly; but she did love him, and she was sorry for him, and there was a relenting tenderness in her mind, even in the face of that coolness between them, which she would have been the last woman in the world to dispel by any word or act of hers. She had no fear that their estrangement would

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be a matter of very long duration. He would humble himself, of course, sooner or later; and when he had done so, when he had fully repented himself of this tacit rebellion, she would receive the prodigal, and propose the seat in parliament and a partial cessation from his legal labours. She would remind him of a fact which had been perhaps too much ignored by both—that her fortune was his fortune, and that the renown which he might achieve by a disinterested pursuit of fame would be dearer to her than any of those sordid successes which were only estimable by the amount of pounds shillings and pence that they brought with them.

She meant to do all this in good time. She was not an enthusiast, who, on being inspired by a new idea, runs off flushed and eager to communicate it to the ear of sympathy. She made up her mind with deliberation, and allowed her purpose to incubate, as it were, in the silent calmness of her soul. She felt that she was taking a generous—nay, even noble—view of her husband's position, and that he could not fail to receive her proposition with ready assent and some gratitude.

'There are women who would part from him for ever after such a discovery,' she said to herself; and

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such a parting had indeed been her first thought, strangled in its birth by the consideration of the world's wonder. Mrs. Harcross was a person who could not permit the world to wonder about her.

Mr. Harcross had his duties as steward; and before one o'clock, he and Captain Hardwood, Weston Vallory, and Mr. M'Gall the reviewer were amongst the crowd, duly blue-ribboned and rose-budded. Weston found his way to Miss Bond, radiant in her pink dress. She had contrived to slip her moorings from her father's arm; and while that seriously-minded gentleman was arguing on the subject of justification by faith with another seriously-minded gentleman, Jane had drifted as far away from him as she could, and was receiving the compliments of rural swains, with all the more freedom on account of the enforced absence of Mr. Flood, who was on duty in the stables at this hour, assisting in the putting-up of wagonettes and whitechapel carts. The barouches and landaus and omnibuses of the gentry were only just beginning to arrive.

Jane welcomed Mr. Vallory with a blush and a simper. Her rural admirers were very soon made to feel themselves at a disadvantage beside this splendid London dandy, and shambled off with a sense of

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defeat and discomfiture to console themselves with a 'shy' at Aunt Sally.

'How charming you look in that pink gown!' said Weston, surveying the damsel with his bold stare; 'it's the prettiest costume I've seen to-day.'

'I'm glad you like it,' the girl answered. 'I bought it with your present; but of course I daredn't tell father so. He'd have turned me out of doors, I think, if he'd found out as I'd taken that sovering.'

'Then you shall not run the risk of expulsion again, for when I give you another present, it shall be a gown of my own choosing.'

'O no, nor that wouldn't do neither; leastways, father would be sure to find out if I were to get a new gown like that. I had to tell him a fib about this one—that I'd saved up my money to buy it. He does give me a shilling once in a way; but he's dreadful near. I know I didn't ought to have taken that money from you; but I did so want to buy something new for to-day, and it seemed to come so handy.'

'Sweet simplicity!' said Weston, with his artificial smile. 'There are women in London with not half your attractions whose milliners' bills come to five hundred a year; and are sometimes paid, too.'

He strolled by Miss Bond's side under the trees,

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thinking this the pleasantest part of his stewardship. Mr. Harcross met them face to face presently, and marked his friend Weston's rustic flirtation as he went by, in conversation with one of the chief tenants, a stalwart farmer of the genuine *Speed-the-Plough* type, to whom he had been specially introduced by Sir Francis, and who volunteered to support him as vice-chairman at the dinner-table. The stewards had drawn lots for the tables at which they were to preside, and Mr. Harcross's lot had fallen on one of the tables at the earlier and humbler banquet.

'I'll stand by you, Mr. Chairman,' said Mr. Holby, the farmer; 'I think I know everybody within ten mile of Kingsbury, man, woman, and child; and all I wish is, that there was enough of 'em to gather my hops without emplying any of these here Irish tramps.'

'You belong to Kingsbury, do you, Mr. Holby?' Hubert Harcross asked, with a thoughtful face, when he had done a good deal of duty talk about corn and hops.

'Higgs's farm, sir, within a mile of Kingsbury Church. I've farmed that land of Sir Francis's ever since old Higgs died, which is above seven-and-thirty year ago.'

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'Higgs's farm; yes, I remember. That's not far from a place called Brierwood, is it?'

'Not above two mile. I've walked it many a time between tea and supper, when Richard Redmayne was a pleasanter kind of fellow than he is now, twelve or fifteen year ago, when his daughter that died was only a little lass not higher than that.'

He held his sunburnt hand a yard or so from the ground, looking downward fondly as if he could see the fair head of that little lass as he had seen it years ago.

Who could have thought that it would be so sharp a pain only to hear of these things? Mr. Harcross felt as if a knife had gone through his heart. It was some moments before he could speak. O God, to think of her a little innocent child, and that she should have been predestined to love him dearly, and to die broken-hearted for his sin!

He would have let the subject drop at once, as a theme unspeakably painful, had he not been eager to satisfy himself upon one point. There had been something in the farmer's speech which mystified him not a little.

'You spoke of Richard Redmayne as if you had seen him lately,' he said; 'I understood the whole family had emigrated.'

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'Ay, ay,' answered the farmer, with ponderous slowness; 'the family did emigrate—Jim and his wife, and the two boys, tall well-grown lads as you could see anywheres. They went out to Australia, where Richard had bought a stiffish bit of land, I've heard say, for about a tenth part the price an acre as you'd give in these parts. They went out, Jim, his wife, and boys, soon after Richard's daughter died. She died away from home, you see, sir, and there was a good deal of trouble about it; and I don't believe as anybody hereabouts knows azactually the rights and wrongs of that story; and it's my idea as there was more wrongs than rights in it.'

Whereupon Mr. Harcross had to hear the story of Grace Redmayne's death, delivered conjecturally, by Mr. Holby of Higgs's farm, after a rambling fashion, with much commentary.

'It were a sad loss for poor Rick, sir; for she was as sweet a young woman as ever stept,' concluded the farmer.

Mr. Harcross was compelled to repeat his question.

'I asked you if Mr. Redmayne was still in Australia,' he said.

'Ay, ay, to be sure, to be sure. No, not Rick Redmayne. Jim and his wife and boys are over

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yonder, but Richard come home the other day, as changed a man as I ever saw. Him and me used to have many a pleasant hour together of a summer evening, with a pipe of tobacco and a jug of home-brewed. But that's all over now. He hasn't been anigh his friends since he come back; and he lets his friends see pretty plain as he don't want them to go anigh him.'

'He is at home, then—at Brierwood?'

'Yes. I saw him standing by the gate the night before last, as I drove home from market.'

To say that this intelligence awakened anything like fear in Hubert Harcross's mind would be to do him injustice. He was not the kind of man to fear the face of his fellow-man. But the knowledge that Richard Redmayne was near at hand filled him with a vague horror nevertheless. 'Of all men else I have avoided thee.' True that even if they met face to face, there was little chance of his being recognised by Grace's father. That foolish gift, the locket with his likeness in it, had been lost. Grace had told him that during the brief dreamlike railway journey betwixt Tunbridge and London, when she had sat with her hand in his, confessing all the sadness of her life without him. Strange to look back upon it all, and

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think of himself, almost as if he had been some one else outside that sorrowful story; to think of himself and all he had hoped for and looked forward to that day, when he had deemed it possible to serve two masters, to hold his appointed place in the world, and yet make for himself one sweet and secret sanctuary remote from all worldly influences.

No, that schoolboy love-token, the locket, being happily gone, there was no fear of any recognition on the part of the farmer, even if they were to meet; nor under the name of Harcross could Richard Redmayne suspect the presence of Walgrave. 'So, for once in a way, that absurd change of name is an advantage,' thought Mr. Harcross.

The first dinner-bell rang while he was holding this review of the situation, a cheery peal, which brightened the faces of all the early diners. Colonel Davenant would fain have fired a cannon as the signal of the feast; but this idea not being received favourably, was obliged to content himself with the great alarm-bell, which hung in a cupola above the hall, and a fine old Indian gong, which had been brought out upon the lawn, where the Colonel himself officiated, with very much the air of an enterprising showman at a country fair.

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'Now, Harcross,' he cried presently, swooping down upon the barrister as he sauntered under the trees beside Mr. Holby of Higgs's farm,—'now, Harcross, you know your tent, don't you, old fellow, the one with the blue flags? Your people are pouring in already. You really ought to be in your place, you know; come along.'

'Be in time,' said Mr. Harcross, laughing; 'just agoing to begin.'

He shook off all thoughts of Grace Redmayne's father, for the moment at least, but not without an effort, and made his way to the blue-flag-bedecked marquee, attended by his esquire, Farmer Holby.

'You must propose almost all the toasts, Mr. Holby,' he said, in his careless way; 'for I really haven't a notion of what I am expected to do.'

This was hardly fair to Colonel Davenant, who had existed for the last week with a pencil in one hand and a pocket-book in the other, and had drawn up elaborate plans of the tables, with everybody's appointed place thereat—so that no rural Capulet should find himself seated next his detested Montague, no village Ghibelline discover a Guelph in his neighbour—and made out lists of all the health-proposing and thanks-giving with as much brown

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study and mental hard labour as if he had been endeavouring to discover the 'differentiate between the finite and the infinite,' which the Yankee lady was lately reported to have hit upon. What pains he had taken to coach Mr. Harcross in his duties! And it had all come to this!

Clevedon lawn at beat of gong was a pretty sight. There were all the elements of an agreeable picture—balmy summer weather, snow-white tents, many-coloured flags fluttering gaily in the sunshine, a crowd of happy people, an atmosphere of eating and drinking, and for a background the fine old red-brick house, with its stone mullions and cornices, and quaint pinnacles standing out in sharp relief against a sky that was bluer than the skies that canopy an English scene are wont to be. But fair as the scene might be without, perhaps the hungry villagers crowding into the tents thought the scene within much pleasanter. What could be more picturesque than those ponderous sirloins; those Gargantuan rounds, with appropriate embellishment of horse-radish and parsley;—those dainty fowls—fowls even for the commonalty—those golden-crusted pies, with pigeons' feet turned meekly upward, as in mute protest against their barbarous murder, pies

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whose very odour from afar off was to distraction savoury; that delicate pigling, slain untimely; those forequarters of adolescent sheep, which were still by courtesy lamb; those plump young geese, foredoomed to die before their legitimate hour? What contrast of colour could be more delightful than that presented by the mellow Indian-red and burnt-sienna hues of the meat and poultry against the cool tender greens of the salads, the golden yolks of eggs in rings of virgin white, the paler gold of the gigantic French loaves, baked on purpose for the festival, from which a man might cut a quarter of a yard or so without making any serious difference in the bulk of the whole?

At one end of the tent, and conveniently near the chairman's elbow, there was a small colony of beer-barrels, and a stack of wines and spirits, as neatly arranged and as amply provided as in the lazaret of an East Indiaman. Over these it was Mr. Harcross's duty to preside, assisted by the under butler.

He found himself seated in his place presently, amidst a tremendous shuffling of feet, and scrooping of benches, and whispering, and subdued tittering, as the guests arranged themselves, under the all-directing eye of the Colonel, who had appointed him-

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self commander-in-chief or generalissimo of all the tables.

'Silence, if you please, ladies and gentlemen! silence for grace!' he roared in stentorian accents, which might have made his fortune as a toastmaster; whereat a very mild-looking gentleman, with a white cravat and long straight hair, whom Mr. Harcross had not observed before, rose at the other end of the tent, and invoked a blessing upon the banquet, which was almost as long as his hair. Directly it was over there arose a general gasp, as of relief, and then a tremendous clattering of knives and forks.

The Colonel walked round the tent, calling attention to the different viands.

'There's a magnificent sirloin yonder, ma'am, roasted to a turn,' he said confidentially to a ponderous matron; 'I should recommend *you* a plate of *that*. And if you, my love, have any taste for roast goose,' he went on to a blushing damsel next but one, 'there's as fine a bird as ever was hatched just before you. Which gentleman on this side of the table will undertake to cut up a goose?' And so on, and so on, with variations, continued the Colonel, till he had made the round of one tent and shot off to do his duty in the other.

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Mr. Harcross, in a much more subdued manner, made himself agreeable to the company. He saw that all glasses were duly filled with sparkling ale, or the more sustaining porter ; he administered sherry to the fairer sex, and kept an eye even on distant diners. The rural population proving unequal to the manipulation of carving-knives and forks, he sent for one joint after another, and demolished them with a quiet dexterity which, to these wondering rustics, appeared a species of legerdemain. He did more carving in half an hour than he ever remembered to have accomplished in his life before, since his lot had fallen in the days of vicarious carving, and he contrived to keep up a running flirtation all the time with the young lady seated on his left hand. He had an old woman in a black bonnet on his right, the most ancient female in Kingsbury parish, who was reputed to have used the first mangle ever seen in those parts, and to have been the last person to ride pillion.

This honourable matron being stone deaf, the attentions of Mr. Harcross were necessarily confined to a careful provision for her creature comforts. He supplied her with tender breasts of chicken and the crumbiest pieces of bread he could obtain, and de-

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voutly hoped that she would mumble her share of the feast without choking herself. Having performed these charitable offices, he was free to devote his conversational powers to his left-hand neighbour, who was young and handsome, and was, moreover, the very young person he had seen engaged in a flirtation with Weston Vallory.

Mr. Harcross was in that mood in which a man is ready for any immediate amusement, however puerile, that may serve to divert his mind from painful memories—for any excitement, however vulgar, which may help to numb the slow agony of remorse. There was no pleasure to him in talking shallow nonsense with this low-born beauty, but the rattle and the laughter and the wine made up some kind of relief. He took a good deal more wine than he was accustomed to take at that time of day; he talked more than he was in the habit of talking, until he shone out in a gentlemanly way at the eight-o'clock dinner; and the talk and the wine together kept him from thinking of Richard Redmayne. He did not glance round the table with fearful eyes, dreading to see that fatal unknown figure appear, Banquo-like, amidst the revellers. That most unwelcome discovery which he had made by means of Mr. Holby

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the farmer had left only an undefined sense of discomfort—a feeling that there was trouble near.

Miss Bond, in the mean time, was very well pleased with her position and surroundings. In the first place, it was a grand thing for her to be in the post of honour, next the gentleman-steward, to which place she had drifted in the general confusion, while more timid maidens hung back upon the arms of kindred or lovers, waiting to be pushed into their seats; and in the second place, it was a pleasant thing to have disappointed Weston Vallory, who had expressed his desire that she should sit next him in the tent with the red flags; and lastly, it was a still more delightful thing to inspire jealousy and gloom in the breast of her faithful Joseph Flood, who had been released from his duties in time for the banquet, and who sat divided from his betrothed by half-a-dozen banqueters, glaring at her savagely, in silent indignation at her coquetry.

'This is the fine gentleman from London that she talked about,' he said to himself; and in his estimation Mr. Harcross suffered for all the sins of Weston Vallory. 'I reckon she'll scarcely open her lips to me all the afternoon, as long as she can get him to talk to.'

Miss Bond was conscious of her lover's baleful

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glances, and improved the occasion, bringing all her fascinations to bear upon Mr. Harcross. The rustic feast would have been a slow business without this amusement. There was a great deal of talk, and still more laughter, inextinguishable laughter, at the feeblest and most threadbare jokes. The conversation was that of people who seemed to have no memory of the past, no consideration for the future—a people existing as entirely in the present hour as if they had been bovine creatures without consciousness of yesterday. Their little jokes, their friendly facetiousness had a mechanical air, and seemed almost as wooden as the clumsy furniture of their cottages, handed down from generation to generation.

Mr. Harcross's previous experience of this class had been entirely confined to the witness-box; but he found that as in the witness-box, so were they in social life. 'And yet I suppose there are fine characters, or the material for fine characters, among them,' he thought in one of the pauses of his flirtation, as he contemplated the curious faces—some stolid and expressionless, some solemn and important, some grinning with a wooden grin. 'I suppose there is the same proportion of intellect amongst a given number of these people as among the same number of men bred at Westminster and Oxford, if

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one could penetrate the outer husk, make due allowance for the differences of habit and culture, and get at the kernel within. Or is the whole thing a question of blood, and mankind subject to the same laws which govern the development of a racehorse? I wonder how many dormant Bunyans and Burnses there may be in such an assembly as this.'

He had not much time for idle conjectures at this stage of the entertainment, for the toasts followed one another fast and furiously.

The loyal and ceremonial toasts, 'Sir Francis Clevedon, Lady Clevedon, and Miss Clevedon,' 'Colonel Davenant,' 'John Wort,' the steward, 'Mr. Holby,' the oldest and most important tenant, who had condescended to take a seat at this inferior table, when his rank entitled him to the best place at the superior board—all these and sundry other toasts were proposed in discreet and appropriate language by Hubert Harcross, with much secret weariness of spirit; and after every toast there was a long lumbering speech from some one in acknowledgment thereof. Mr. Harcross thought these people would never have done eating and drinking, that this health-proposing and thanks-returning would never come to an end. It was only half-past three when all was over, and he came out of the tent amidst the crowd with

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Jane Bond by his side, but it seemed to him as if the business had lasted a day and a night.

The local band had brayed itself breathless, and had retired to refresh itself in one of the tents; and now the band from London began to scrape its fiddles, and tighten the strings of its violoncello, and juggle mysteriously with little brass screws in its cornets, preparatory to performing the newest dance music for the rest of the afternoon.

'You must keep the last waltz for me,' said Mr. Harcross, casting himself on the grass at the feet of Miss Bond, who had seated herself on a bench under the trees. 'I feel as if I should not be equal to anything before that. What a relief it is to get into the open air and smell the pine trees after the atmosphere of that tent! I felt the thermometer rising as it must have done in the Black Hole.'

'I don't know how to waltz,' replied Miss Bond, casting down her eyes. 'Father has always set his face against dancing; but I know the Lancers and the Caledonians. I learnt the figures out of a book.'

'Then we'll dance the Lancers,' Mr. Harcross said with a yawn, 'though it is the most idiotic performance ever devised for the abasement of mankind. What would Dog-ribs or Rocky Mountain Indians think of us, if they saw us dancing the Lancers? I

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believe the Dog-ribs have a dance of their own, by the way, a dance of amity, which is performed when friends meet after long severance, and which lasts two days at a stretch—a dance which, I take it, must be something of the Lancer or Caledonian species.'

He closed his eyes, and slumbered for a few minutes peacefully, as he had often slept in law-courts and committee-rooms, while the band from London played a good honest country dance. He had no very precise idea of the duties of his stewardship, or what more might be required of him. He might be wanted to dance with the oldest woman of the party, or the youngest, or the prettiest, or the ugliest; but he was not inclined to give himself any farther trouble, and if Colonel Davenant had any new task to impose upon him, he would have to come and find him. There was a soothing sensation in the touch of that soft warm turf, in the odoriferous breathing of the pine trees, stirred gently by a light summer wind. He thought of that other holiday afternoon at Clevedon, and a vision of Grace Redmayne rose before him in her pale young beauty. O God, if he could have opened his eyes to find himself at *her* feet! He thought of those two mournful lines which Southey quotes in the *Doctor:*

'O, if in after life we could but gather
The very refuse of our youthful hours!'

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CHAPTER VIII.

'THOU ART THE MAN.'

At three o'clock the gentry went to luncheon in the great dining-room. They had been arriving from one o'clock upwards, and had spent the interval in sauntering about the upper part of the lawn, gazing from a respectful distance at the happy rustics very much as they might have done at animals in cages. It is possible that this amusement, even when eked out by conversation and croquet, and enlivened by the strains of the local band, may have somewhat palled upon the county families, and that the signal for the patrician banquet was a welcome relief. However this might be, the spirits of Sir Francis Clevedon's friends rose perceptibly in the banquet-hall. Incipient flirtations, which had only budded feebly on the lawn, burst into full blossom under the influence of sparkling wines, and that delightfully bewildering concert of voices produced by three-and-twenty different *tête-à-têtes* all going on at once. Georgie was eminently

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happy as she sat opposite her adored Francis, at this their first large party, for she felt that the fête was a success, and the eye of the county was upon them.

All the windows were open, and the cheering from the tents on the lawn mingled not unpleasantly with the merry confusion of voices within. It was a nice thing to know that those poor creatures who were not in society were for once enjoying themselves.

'How strange it must seem to them to taste champagne!' said the pretty Miss Stalman to her latest admirer; 'I wonder if they are afraid it will go off and blow them up, like gunpowder.'

'Don't know, I'm shaw,' replied the gentleman; 'but I should imagine they were hardly up to it. They'll take it for a superior kind of beer. Champagne is a question of education, you see. There are people who believe implicitly in any wine that'll blow a cork out of a bottle.'

It was nearly three o'clock when Mr. Redmayne presented his card of admission at the south lodge, guarded to-day by an official from the Tunbridge police-office, who gave him a secondary ticket, printed on pink tissue paper, which was to admit him to the tenants' marquee.

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'You'd better look sharp, sir,' said this official in a friendly tone; 'the tenants' dinner was to begin at three o'clock punctual.'

'I didn't mean to dine,' Richard answered dubiously; 'I only came to look about a little.'

'Not go in to dinner, Mr. Redmayne!' exclaimed the policeman, who knew the master of Brierwood by sight; 'and it's to be as fine a dinner as ever was eaten. Sure to goodness, you'd never be so foolish!'

Mr. Redmayne gave him a nod and went on, pledging himself to nothing. He thought he could stroll about on the outskirts of the crowd, and see as much of the festival as he cared to see, without joining in any of the festivities. But when he came to the lawn where the revelry was held, he found himself pounced upon by the ubiquitous Colonel, who was marshalling the tenants to their places, and who seized upon his pink-paper ticket and examined it eagerly.

'No. 53,' he exclaimed; 'the seats are all numbered. If you'll follow those ladies and gentlemen, sir, into that tent. Keep your ticket, the stewards are inside. Go on, sir, if you please.' And not caring to remonstrate, Richard Redmayne went the way Fate drifted him, and found himself presently seated

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at the board between two strangers, cheered by that inspiring melody, 'The Roast Beef of Old England.'

The dinner in the tenants' marquee did not differ materially from the humbler banquet of the villagers. The viands were of a more epicurean character: there were savoury jellies, and raised pies, and lobster salads, as a relief to the rounds and sirloins, and there were no such vulgarities as goose or sucking-pig. There were tartlets and cheese-cakes, and creams and blancmanges, and glowing pyramids of hot-house grapes and wall-fruit, for the feminine banqueters, and there were sparkling wines and bottled ales in abundance. There was the same crescendo of multitudinous voices, and the jokes, though somewhat more refined than the humour of the villagers, had the same rustic flavour.

Richard Redmayne had of late found it easier to drink than to eat; so he did scanty justice to sirloin or savoury pie, but made up the deficiency by a considerable consumption of champagne, a wine he had learnt to drink in his gold-digging days, when the lucky digger was wont to 'shout'—that is to say, pay the shot—for the refreshment of his comrades. He sat in moody silence, amidst all that talk and laughter, and drank and thought of his troubles.

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They had been brought sharply home to him by the presence of John Wort, who sat at the bottom of the table, while Colonel Davenant took the chair at the top. He had not spoken to the steward since that night in his office, and the sight of him set him thinking of his wrongs with renewed bitterness.

'*He* knew the man,' he said to himself. 'He brought him to my house. But for him my little girl might be with me to-day.'

It was a bitter thought, not to be drowned in the vintage of Perrier or Moet. The man went on drinking, uncheered by the wine, growing gloomier, rather, as he drank.

The toasts had not yet begun. Sir Francis was to bid his guests welcome before that ceremony was entered upon. It was about half-past four, when there was a little buzz and movement at the entrance of the marquee, and a great many people stood up, as if a monarch had appeared among them.

Richard Redmayne looked up listlessly enough, not having the keen personal interest of the tenants, to whom this man's favour was to be as the sun itself, diffusing light and heat. He looked up, and saw a tall slim young man coming slowly along on the opposite side of the table, stopping to speak to one,

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and to shake hands with another, and ready with a pleasant greeting for all; a darkly handsome face, smiling kindly, while all the assembly stood at gaze.

After that one careless upward glance, Richard Redmayne sat staring at the new-comer, motionless, nay almost breathless, as a man of stone. Had not those very lineaments been bitten into the tablet of his mind with the corroding acid of hate? The face was a face which he had seen in many of his dreams of late. The face of a man with whom he had grappled, hand to hand and foot to foot, in many a visionary struggle—a countenance he had hardly hoped to look upon in the flesh. It was the very face which he had pored upon so often, in that foolish toy, his dead girl's locket. He had the thing in his breast to-day, fastened to his watch ribbon.

'What! was *he* the man?' he said to himself at last, drawing a long slow breath.

Was this the man—Sir Francis Clevedon? In that sudden light of conviction, Richard Redmayne began to wonder that he had never guessed as much as this: the man who came to Brierwood, recommended and guaranteed by John Wort: the man who had free access to Clevedon, and whom Wort had seemed anxious in every respect to oblige. He re-

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membered that stormy interview in the little office at Kingsbury, and John Wort's endeavour to shield the delinquent. Yes, the murder was out. This hero of the hour, upon whom all the world was smiling, was the destroyer of his child.

The savage thirst for vengeance which took possession of him on this discovery was tempered by no restraining influence. For years past all his thoughts and dreams and desires had tended to one deadly end. Whatever religious sentiments he had cherished in his youth—and very few young men with innocent surroundings are irreligious—had been withered by this soul-blasting grief. Nor had his Australian experience been without an evil effect upon his character. It had made a naturally careless disposition reckless to lawlessness. Of all the consequences which might tread upon the heels of any desperate act of his he took no heed. He reasoned no more than a savage might have reasoned; but having, as he thought, found his enemy, his whole being was governed by but one consideration, as to the mode and manner of that settlement which must come between them.

He sat in his place and meditated this question, while Sir Francis Clevedon made his way round the table. It was a somewhat protracted journey, for

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the Baronet had something particular to say to a great many of his tenants: he had set his heart upon holding a better place in their estimation than his father had held, on being something more to them than an absorbent of rents. He talked to the matrons, and complimented the daughters; and had a good deal to say about harvest and hopping, and the coming season of field sports, to the fathers and sons. What a herd of sycophants those people seemed to Richard Redmayne's jaundiced soul as they paid their honest homage to the proprietor of their homesteads, and what a hypocrite the squire who received their worship!

'Does he mean to break the hearts of any of *their* daughters?' he thought, as he saw the matrons smiling up at him, the maidens downcast and blushing.

Sir Francis was close behind him presently, and paused for a moment to glance at that one sullen figure which did not move as he passed—only for a moment, there were so many to speak to. The man's potations had been a trifle too deep, perhaps.

The man drank deeper before the banquet was over. He went on drinking in his gloomy silent way, during that lengthy ceremonial of toast-proposing. Sir Francis had stood at the end of the table by John Wort, and made a cheery little speech to set them

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going, and then had slipped away, leaving the Colonel, who loved all manner of speechification, in his glory. How he hammered at the toasts, heaping every hyperbolical virtue upon the head of his subject!—that honourable, noble-hearted, worthy English farmer, Mr. A., whom they all knew and esteemed, and whom it was a proud thing to know, and an impossible thing not to esteem, and who, &c. &c.

> 'As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
> Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm;
> Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
> Eternal sunshine settles on its head.'

What little gushes of sentiment welled from the kindly Colonel's lips; what scraps of poetry more or less appropriate, but always applauded to the echo; what swelling adjectives rolled off his fluent tongue; and how the champagne corks flew, and the honest brown sherry—a sound sustaining wine—shrank in the decanters!

Richard Redmayne sat it all out, though the talk and laughter, the cheering and jolly-good-fellowing, made little more than a mere Babel sound in his ears. He sat on, not caring to draw people's attention upon him by an untimely departure; sat on drinking brandy-and-water, and having no more

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fellowship with the feasters than if he had been the skull at an Egyptian banquet.

At last the revelry, or this stage of the revelry, was over, and the tenants left their tent. Dancing had been in full progress for some time among the humbler guests, and the wide lawn in the evening sunlight presented a pretty picture of village festivity: the music of an old-fashioned country dance was sounding gaily, a long line of figures threading the needle—the women in bright-coloured gowns and ribbons, the men with gaudy neckerchiefs and light waistcoats—all moving, all full of life and colour, the low western sun shining on them, the joy-bells of Kingsbury Church ringing a vesper peal.

Sir Francis was standing on the outskirts of the lawn, with his wife on his arm, watching the dancers. They moved slowly away as Richard Redmayne crossed the grass on his way towards them. His quick eye had seen that hated figure, and he went across the lawn intending to speak to his enemy, even in that place and at that time.

His wrath had kept for years, and had strengthened with his nursing; but he was not a man to delay the time of reckoning by so much as an hour. He had no clear idea of what he meant to say, nor

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had his libations in the tent conduced to clearness of brain; but he knew that he meant to denounce Francis Clevedon before the face of all the world.

'I'll let them know what a noble gentleman they've got for their landlord,' he said to himself. 'I'll stop all their humbug and palaver, and make them sing to a different tune. I should think the fathers that have only daughters will turn their backs upon him, anyhow.'

He followed Sir Francis and his wife at a respectful distance as they strolled slowly towards the house, biding his time, but meaning to come up with them presently. They did not go in by the chief entrance, but by an iron wicket leading into the garden, which lay at one side of the Hall, and extended for a long way behind it. They had disappeared behind the angle of the house by the time Mr. Redmayne came to this gate. He entered the garden, however, and went round to the back of the house.

The library was on this side of Clevedon Hall. Its five windows opened on the grass-plots and flower-beds, and commanded a view of the fish-pond, where there were gold and silver fish in abundance now—happy fish, which were fed every morning by Geor-

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gie's hand. A huge gray cockatoo—a wedding present from the Colonel to his daughter—was screaming on its perch before an open glass door. This was the only open door Richard Redmayne could see, as he cast a quick look along the house. He crossed the grass-plot with a rapid footstep, and looked into the room.

After the vivid sunshine out of doors the Clevedon library had a dusky look. The walls had been lined by Clevedons of a more studious temper than the baronets of later generations. From floor to ceiling the room was filled with books, and massive oaken bookcases, seven feet high, stood out from the walls, dividing the chamber into various nooks and recesses, or pens rather, where a student might pore over some ancient volume in the strictest solitude, although the centre of the room were ever so well occupied. It seemed a darksome apartment to Richard Redmayne as he peered in, with his back to the garden and the sunlight. Those walls of brown-backed folios and quartos, enlivened here and there by a row of duodecimos in faded crimson morocco, or a little batch of octavos in vellum, had a sober air that was almost gloomy. There was none of the costliness and luxury of binding which render

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modern libraries things of beauty. The volumes had been collected in an age when it was the fashion to make the outsides of books as repulsive as possible; when knowledge was for the privileged classes, and the solemn muses of history and poetry, and the graver geniuses of philosophy and science, disdained to make themselves attractive by meretricious arts in the way of outward adornment.

Richard Redmayne gave a hasty glance round the room, and thought that it was 'unked;' and then seeing a white dress near a distant door, which he took to be Lady Clevedon's, stepped boldly in.

The lady by the door turned at the sound of the farmer's footstep on the uncarpeted oak floor. It was Georgie, who had been in the act of leaving the room as the intruder entered. She looked at him with a little surprise, but without alarm. It was scarcely strange that unknown figures should be wandering about to-day.

'You are looking for some one, I suppose,' she said, with her pretty smile.

'Yes, I am looking for Sir Francis Clevedon.'

'He was here scarcely a minute ago; but I don't think you can see him just yet. He has gone to the billiard-room with General Cheviot. Is it anything very particular you have to say to him?'

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She fancied the strange man must be one of the tenants, who wanted his roof repaired, perhaps, or new pigsties, and who chose this inappropriate occasion for the preferment of his request.

'It *is* something very particular,' said Richard, in a strange voice; 'I never thought to see Sir Francis Clevedon's face as I have seen it to-day.'

The strangeness of the words, as well as of the man's tone and manner, startled her. He was deadly pale, too; she could see that, although he stood with his back to the light.

He had been taking too much champagne, perhaps; that was the most natural explanation of the business. What a horrible situation, to be left alone in this great room with a dreadful tipsy farmer! Poor Georgie gave a little shudder, and moved hastily towards the door.

'I will send some one to tell my husband you want to see him,' she said, in a conciliating tone, 'if you'll be good enough to sit down and wait.'

'Don't go, Lady Clevedon. Perhaps I'd better tell *you* my story. Women are supposed to be compassionate; and I have heard so much of your goodness. You don't mind listening to me for a few minutes, do you?'

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Georgie hesitated. No, this was no tipsy farmer. The man's earnestness at once interested and alarmed her.

'I never meant to come to Clevedon to-day. I almost wish, for your sake, I hadn't come. It was my fate, I suppose, that sent me here, or those devilish joy-bells clanging all the morning that drove me. Anyhow I came; came to find the man I have been looking for, on and off, since my daughter died.'

He stood with his hand resting on a carved oaken reading-desk, looking down at Lady Clevedon, who had seated herself a little way off, thinking it wisest to seem calm and self-possessed. What if the man were some maniac who had stolen in among the guests? There was much in his manner to suggest such a fear—no hint of violence, but rather an unnatural calmness, which was still more appalling.

'Looking for him, on and off,' he repeated, 'since my daughter died. You have heard of me perhaps, Lady Clevedon; my name is Richard Redmayne.'

'Yes, I have heard of you.'

'And you have heard my story, I suppose?'

'I have been told you had a daughter whom you lost, and whose death affected you severely.'

'What, was that all? Did you hear no specula-

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tions as to the cause of her death; no hints of a seduction; a foolish trusting girl tempted away from her home?'

'No,' Georgie answered gently; 'I have heard nothing but the mere fact of your daughter's early death. But if the story is indeed so sad a one as you seem to say, I am sincerely sorry for you.'

She thought that the man had been drinking, until the recollection of his wrongs and sorrows had in some measure affected his brain. She was very patient with him therefore, willing even to listen sympathisingly to any statement of his wrongs, whereby he might relieve an overburdened breast.

'Who said my daughter was disgraced?' he exclaimed, taking up her words with an indignant air. 'Not I. God would not suffer that. She was too pure to be the victim of a scoundrel. Death came between her and her tempter. But her death be upon his head!'

'I can't quite understand the story,' faltered Georgie; 'but I am sorry for you with all my heart.'

'Be sorry for yourself, Lady Clevedon; for you are the wife of a villain.'

O, the man was mad evidently, a wretched creature whom grief had made distraught. Her first

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thought had been right. She glanced towards the door with a little look of terror, and rose from her chair, her first impulse being to fly. Richard Redmayne laid his hand upon her arm.

'Stop,' he said, 'I want you to answer a question. What do you think of a man who came to my house under a false name, came to a neighbourhood where he should have come as master and landowner; came on the sly, pretending to be a stranger; came into an honest man's house and blighted the life of his child; tempted her away from home, under a lying promise of marriage—I have my dead girl's letter to prove that—and never meant to marry her; took her to a house that he had taken under another false name; and when she died in his arms—struck dead by the discovery of his falsehood, as I know she was—within a quarter of an hour of her entrance under that roof, lied again, and swore she was his sister; then buried her in a nameless grave, far away from her home, and left her doting father to find out, how best he might, what had become of his only child? What do you think of such a man as that, Lady Clevedon?'

'What can I think,' said Georgie, who had grown very pale, 'except that he was a villain?'

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'A most consummate villain, eh?'

'A most consummate villain.'

'I am glad you are honest enough to admit that,' said Richard Redmayne, flinging Grace's locket upon the table, with the false back open, and the portrait exposed, 'although the man is your husband.'

'What do you mean, sir?' cried Georgie. 'You must be mad to say such a thing.'

'Look at that,' he said, pointing to the miniature; 'whose face is that, do you think?'

Alas for the fidelity of portraiture! The photograph of Hubert Walgrave Harcross, improved and beautified by the miniature painter, every mark of care and thought and age eliminated, much more nearly resembled the elegant baronet than the studious lawyer. Georgie's heart began to beat wildly, and her hand shook so much, that she could scarcely lift that fatal trinket. She did take it up, however, and looked at it, with a long despairing gaze.

'This is my husband's portrait, certainly,' she said, in slow tremulous tones; 'but what does that prove? Do you suppose that *anything* you can say would make me think ill of *him?*'

'O, I daresay you will stand by him, whatever he may be,' cried Mr. Redmayne, with a sardonic laugh.

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'Besides, it all happened before he married you, and I suppose with a woman that doesn't count. I've heard that some women even like a man better for having been a scoundrel. No, I don't suppose you will think the worse of him for having broken my Grace's heart.'

'How dare you talk to me like that? If I thought —if I could for a moment believe that he had ever done so base a thing, ever been so false and cruel! But I am foolish and wicked to tremble like this. As if *he* ever could have done anything base, as if he could have been a coward and a deceiver! How dare you come here to try and frighten me with this senseless accusation?'

'You have your husband's picture in your hand —the locket he sent my daughter.'

'Do you think I will believe that?' cried Georgie, with a desperate courage, ready to defy this man— nay, Fate itself—rather than acknowledge that her idol could err. 'How can I tell by what means you came by this locket? You may have found it somewhere, and invented this hateful story.'

'It was a love-gift to my daughter; there are plenty who know that. There is a secret spring, you see—the portrait is not meant for common eyes—

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quite a lover's trick. And this man was false and secret in all he did.'

'The picture proves nothing,' Georgie said, with recovered firmness, 'and your accusation is as ridiculous as it is offensive. My husband only came to England last year; until that time he had lived entirely abroad.'

'Were you with him all the time, that you can answer for him so boldly? People come backwards and forwards sometimes, even without telling all their friends about it. I have been to Brisbane and back twice within the last seven years. That man came to Brierwood under a false name, and amused himself looking about his own estate, I suppose, on the sly; and when he got tired of that, amused himself with breaking my daughter's heart. He came recommended by John Wort, the steward; and when I wanted to hunt him down, John Wort stood between him and my vengeance. Fate sent me here to-day, or I might never have known the name of my daughter's murderer.'

'I will not believe it,' repeated Georgie, but this time in a helpless hopeless tone, that was very pitiful. O God! the case seemed made out so fully, and that miniature in her hand was so strong a corroboration

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of the miserable story. What motive could this man have for torturing her with a fabrication? Were the accusation ever so false—and false it must be—the accuser spoke in good faith.

She put her hands before her face, trying to be calm, to quiet the fast-growing confusion of her brain.

'There is some mistake,' she said at last. 'I am very sorry for you; but, believe me, you are completely wrong in your suspicion of my husband. If I do not know every detail of his past life—and I think I do, for he has told me so much about himself—I know, at least, that he is good and honourable, utterly incapable of a base or cowardly action. I should be most unworthy of his love and trust, if I could think ill of him. I cannot tell how this mistake may have arisen, or how you came by that locket; but I can say—yes, with the utmost confidence—that my husband is guiltless of any wrong against you or your daughter.'

She raised her head proudly, looking Francis Clevedon's slanderer full in the face. Even if he were guilty, it was her duty to defend him; but she could not think him guilty. Circumstances might lie, but not Francis Clevedon.

Richard Redmayne surveyed her with a half-contemptuous pity.

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'Of course you'll stand by him,' he said; 'stand me out that he wasn't there, that the portrait you've got in your hand is somebody else's portrait. Women are always ready to do that sort of thing. I'm very sorry for you, Lady Clevedon; but I mean to have some kind of reckoning with this truthful and honourable husband of yours. I mean to let the world hereabouts know what kind of a gentleman Sir Francis Clevedon is. Where can I find him?'

'You are not going to talk about this wretched business before everybody—to make a scene?' cried Georgie, with a woman's natural horror of open scandal.

'I mean to have it out with Sir Francis whenever and wherever I see him. Give me back that locket, if you please.'

He took it from Georgie's hand, and tied it to his watch-ribbon.

'You cannot see Sir Francis this evening; it is quite impossible.'

'I'll find that out for myself,' he said, passing her, and going out of the room.

Georgie followed him into the hall, where he paused, looking about him with a puzzled air. A couple of men-servants were lounging by the open

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door, and Georgie felt herself safe. If necessary, she would order them to turn this man out of the house. She would do it rather than see her husband assailed in the midst of his friends. Who could tell what mischief such an accusation might do him in the estimation of his little world, however baseless the charge might be?

Mr. Redmayne went up to one of the servants, and asked whether Sir Francis was still in the house.

'No, sir; my master went back to the grounds just now with General Cheviot,' answered the man, looking at Richard Redmayne's pale face and loosened neckerchief with some astonishment. He was not one of the house visitors, and had clearly no business in that place; yet he looked too respectable a person to have any sinister motive for his intrusion—a gentleman who had been overcome by bitter beer or champagne, perhaps, and had wandered this way in mere purposeless meandering.

'How long is it since he went out?' asked Richard impatiently. 'What do you mean by "just now"?'

'Ten minutes, if you want to be so uncommon exact about it,' replied the retainer, with an offended air. 'And, I say, if you're one of the tenants, this

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ain't the place as you're invited to. There's the tenants' marquee; that's your place.'

Rick Redmayne passed him without deigning to notice this reproof. If Francis Clevedon had gone back to the grounds, it was his business to follow him. It mattered little where they met, so long as they met speedily.

Georgie had remained by the library door, almost hidden by the deep embrasure. She came out into the hall when Richard Redmayne was gone.

'Send some one to look for your master immediately,' she said to one of the men, 'or go yourself, if that will save time, and tell him I want to speak him at once in my own room.'

'Yes, my lady; perhaps I'd better go myself.'

'Yes, yes, I think you had. And be sure you tell Sir Francis I wish to speak to him at once.'

She stood in the porch for a little while, watching the footman as he crossed the lawn, making his way in and out among the company with tolerable celerity. She watched him till he was out of sight, and then went slowly up the broad oak staircase to the room with the oriel window, and flung herself on her knees before her pet arm-chair, and buried her head in the silken pillows, and sobbed as if her heart were

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broken. Yet she told herself over and over again that, come what might, she would never believe him guilty. But what if, when she told him Richard Redmayne's accusation, as she meant to tell it, word for word—what if he should admit the justice of the charge, strike her dumb by the confession of his infamy? He infamous, he a traitor, he who had so often told her that his past life did not hold act or thought that he cared to keep secret from her! He stand before her unabashed, in the character of a cold-blooded seducer! The thing was not possible. And then she remembered the face that had smiled at her in the locket—his face, and no other. No thought of Hubert Harcross, and that notorious likeness between the two men, ever flashed across her brain. Her mind was too full of that one image. Love narrows the universe to a circle hardly wider than a wedding-ring. She could not look beyond the husband of her choice and the shadow that had come between them.

She rose from her knees at last, after vainly endeavouring to pray, and went to the open window, keeping herself hidden behind the silken curtain, and looking out across the idle crowds, with that brazen dance music sounding in her ears—the slender

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thread of the last street song spun out to attenuation in the last popular waltz.

He would deny, he would explain, she told herself again and again, angry with her own weak spirit for wavering ever so little, yet not able altogether to overcome a sickening sense of fear. If he would only come, and hear her strange story, and set everything right with a few words!

'He has but to look me in the face, and tell me how deeply I have wronged him, and my heart will be at rest,' she said to herself, straining her eyes in their search for that one familiar figure.

She could not see him, and he did not come to her. She would have gone in quest of him herself, but that would have been to run the risk of missing him altogether, should he have received her message, and be on his way to her room. In that large house, and in those crowded grounds, it was so easy to miss any one. No, it was wiser to wait; and she waited, looking at the villagers dancing in the sunset, at the lights beginning to shine out one by one among the trees, as the evening shadows deepened, looking at them without seeing them.

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CHAPTER IX.

'AND THERE NEVER WAS MOONLIGHT SO SWEET AS THIS.'

WESTON VALLORY, being freed from his duties by the breaking-up of the party in the red-flagged tent a considerable time before Lady Clevedon's encounter with Mr. Redmayne, lost no time in seeking his rustic flame, whom he discovered with some trouble seated a little way apart from the revellers, amidst a cluster of pine trees, with Hubert Harcross stretched at her feet.

'I want to know why you used me so cruelly, Miss Bond,' he said, with an air of being profoundly afflicted by her desertion. 'I thought you had promised to sit next me at dinner.'

'Did I?' giggled the coquettish Jane, bridling and simpering after her kind. 'I'm sure I didn't remember anything about it. But you do bother so, there's no knowing what one says.'

'Upon my soul, I consider your conduct most heartless,' drawled Weston—'leaving me to the tender mercies of a stout lady in the laundress interest, and her still stouter sister-in-law, who mangles. It

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was like sitting between two animated feather-beds, with the thermometer at ninety-two—a sort of impromptu Turkish bath, without any douches. The people are dancing out there, in a blaze of sunshine—capital exercise for reducing one's weight, I should think. Will you do anything that way?'

'No, thank you; I'm engaged for the Lancers, and I don't think I shall dance anything else.'

'What, not come unto these yellow sands, and there take hands, and so on? No down the middle, and set to partners, and that kind of thing?'

'No, thank you,' murmured Miss Bond languidly, fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief; 'it's too 'ot for dancing.'

She glanced archly at Mr. Harcross, who had lifted himself into a sitting position, and was surveying Weston lazily between his half-closed eyelids.

'I see you're better engaged,' said Mr. Vallory, turning on his heel.

It was a paltry triumph; but Mr. Harcross felt a malicious gratification in 'taking it out' of Weston, even in so small a matter as this. There are people who seem to occupy the same rank in creation as black-beetles — the only possible pleasure we can have in relation to them is in treading upon them.

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After this, he was bound to devote himself to Jane Bond, however wearisome her society might be to him. They strolled away from the crowd and that wearying sound of popular dance music, walked into the wilder part of the park, and Mr. Harcross tried to abandon himself entirely to the amusement of the moment. He tried to interest himself in the analysis of this vain shallow nature; made the girl tell him all about herself—her engagement to Joseph Flood, her flirtation with Weston Vallory, and those foolish dreams of some high fortune awaiting her in the future, which that insidious flatterer had awakened in her mind. He gave the girl a little good advice upon this; warned her to beware of such flatterers as Weston Vallory, whose homage was very worthless compared to the honest attachment of Mr. Flood.

'As for the good fortune which *may* befall a pretty girl like you, if the right man happens to come across her pathway, that must always remain an unknown quantity,' he said gravely; 'but I believe that, for one pretty girl who marries above her station, there are a hundred pretty girls who live and die happily enough—perhaps quite as happily as the hundred-and-oneth—in their own sphere. I wouldn't

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break Mr. Flood's heart, if I were you, for the sake of a hypothetical offer, or what the lawyers call a contingent remainder.'

'I'm sure I like Joseph well enough,' the girl answered, shrugging her shoulders, and not at all gratified by the practical turn which the conversation had taken. 'I know he's very fond of me, and has stood more from me than most men would stand from any girl. He'd been following me over a year before I ever said a civil word to him—following me as faithful as a dog; but he's so common! And if I marry him, I shall have to work hard all my life.'

'My dear Miss Bond, if you married a duke, you'd have to work a great deal harder.'

'What, do duchesses work?'

'Like galley-slaves. And you'd have to work harder than a duchess to the manner born; for first, you'd have to learn how to play your part—the stage business, as actors say—and then to play it. Upon my word, if you wish to take life easily, I wouldn't recommend you to aspire to the peerage. An honest husband, a tidy cottage, a clean hearth, and a little garden, with roses and sweetbrier and honeysuckle climbing about one's windows—good heavens! I can imagine no existence more perfect than a cottage

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shared with the being one loves. Unhappily, it is only when we begin to descend the slope of the hill that we discover what the perfection of human life means.'

He was thinking of the cottage at Highgate which he had meant to make so bright a bower, and of the bird that had flown heavenward from that fatal nest. 'If I had only known!' That was the perpetual refrain of his lament, the threnody which his soul was continually singing. Miss Bond found this somewhat serious conversation less entertaining than Weston's soft nothings; but there was a satisfaction in the idea of taking a solitary stroll with one of the gentlemen stewards instead of dancing with the common herd, who made themselves so obnoxiously red and warm and breathless with their exertions, and, as it were, a spectacle for the eyes of non-dancing mankind; like wine-flushed helots gyrating for the warning and instruction of Spartan youth.

Perhaps the best part of the whole business, to Miss Bond's mind, the circumstance that gave zest and flavour to this quiet saunter, was the idea that Joseph Flood, lashed into fury by the pangs of jealousy, was following her at a little distance, under cover of the wood, meditating vengeance upon her

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and her companion, and gnashing his teeth in impotent rage. The damsel had something of the angler's instinct, and it was nothing to have hooked her fish unless she could have the pleasure of playing him a little, to his ineffable torture.

'I shall have a nice scene with Joseph to-morrow, I dessay,' she said to Mr. Harcross.

'What, will he be jealous—even of me?'

'Lord bless your heart, I should think he would. He can't abide for me to speak to any one. I think he'd like to have me under lock and key in Maidstone jail rather than that I should enjoy myself a bit, making free with a stranger.'

Weston Vallory walked away from the grassy circle on which the dancers were disporting themselves, smarting under Miss Bond's rebuff, and vindictively disposed towards Mr. Harcross as the primary cause of his humiliation. It was a very small thing, of course, this repulse from a pert village beauty. Mr. Vallory admired the damsel, but it is not to be supposed he cared for her; and yet he felt the affront as keenly as if he had been stung by a woman he adored. He was a man who felt small injuries; indeed his whole existence was

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made up of petty things. He had never cherished a wide aspiration in the whole course of his career. His value as a business man had chiefly consisted in his appreciation of detail, his rapid perception of minutiæ. He was a man who deeply resented trifling affronts; and an affront from Hubert Harcross was thrice as bitter to him as an affront from any one else. That unforgiven wrong concerning Augusta rankled and festered. It seemed as if this man was always blocking his pathway; and after having spoiled the entire scheme of his life, must needs oust him even in so trivial a matter as a flirtation with a pretty peasant girl.

After this vexation he was in no humour for any farther exertions for the amusement of the populace. He had been immeasurably weary of the banquet in the tent, the stifling heat, and noise and riot. Had he not been bound to perform the duties imposed on him by Lady Clevedon in an agreeable manner, so as to secure his future consideration in a very pleasant house, he would have seen this vulgar herd sunk in the nethermost shades of Orcus sooner than he would have endured so much of their company; but of course he must fall in with the humour of the châtelaine if he wished to secure a hearty welcome at Clevedon in

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seasons to come; and as the house was agreeable, the *cuisine* irreproachable, his bedchamber spacious and facing the south-east, he did not object to take some trouble to please his hostess. The thing was done, however; and he washed his hands of these bucolic swains and their apple-cheeked sweethearts. He left them to tread their measures without him, and strolled away towards the sunny old garden, where Lady Clevedon was accustomed to hold her kettledrum.

There was no kettledrum in the garden this afternoon. Times and seasons were out of joint; those formal meals which mark the passing hours upon the social dial were exploded, or topsy-turvified. It was now five o'clock, and the luncheon in the great dining-hall was only just over; servants were dispensing coffee on the terrace, where the aristocratic guests had gathered to watch the dancing, and some of them to do a little flirtation on their own account. Mr. Vallory had no more inclination to join this privileged class than to caper with panting nymphs and shepherds on the sunlit grass. In plain English, Mr. Vallory was out of temper, and wanted to calm himself down with a quiet cigar. He was very glad to find the garden deserted, the roses and carnations wasting their spicery on the empty summer air.

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He smoked a couple of cigars, strolling up and down the broad gravel walk leading to Lady Clevedon's favourite summer-house; and when he grew tired of this recreation, seated himself comfortably in the summer-house, with his back against the wall and his legs stretched luxuriously upon a rustic chair. He sat thus, basking in the afternoon sunshine and meditating his injuries.

'Let me only get up a good case; put this little story of Miss Brierwood—no, Redmayne—and the lodger into a practicable form, and I shall lose no farther time in letting my cousin Augusta know what kind of a husband she secured for herself when she jilted me. I wonder how she would take it if I unearthed Miss Redmayne for her, and convinced her that my friend Harcross is a scoundrel. I daresay she'd make a good deal of fuss about it, and threaten no end of legal separations, and in the end forgive him; women generally do; and yet she's a little out of the common line. I hardly think she'd stomach any carrying-on of that kind. No; I think if I once opened her eyes upon the subject, my friend Harcross would have a bad time of it.'

The sunshine, which glared full upon the summer-house at this time, began to grow troublesome, so Mr.

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Vallory left that retreat and sauntered towards the house. The cockatoo was screaming on his perch, and he went across the grass to it, and amused himself a little at the creature's expense; then growing speedily weary of its indignant gobblings and snappings, he looked into the library, and seeing no one in the spacious cool-looking chamber, went in, and planted himself comfortably in an easy-chair by one of the windows, shut in completely from the rest of the room by one of those seven-feet-high bookcases which jutted out from the wall. In this sheltered nook he found *Punch*, and a new magazine or two, just sufficient literature wherewith to read himself to sleep. He opened one of the magazines, turned over the leaves listlessly, read half a page or so, and anon slumbered, letting the book glide gently from his relaxing hand. This happened about an hour before Richard Redmayne confronted Lady Clevedon in that room.

Nothing could be more placid than Weston Vallory's repose. The burden of his annoyances slipped away from him in the sensual delight of that perfect rest in a supremely comfortable chair, in a cool quiet room, with the balmy breath of summer stealing gently across his face as he slept. For a long time

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his sleep was dreamless, his brain empty of every impression; then came a semi-consciousness of something, he knew not what, going on near him, a vague idea that he ought to be awake and up, and that he must break loose from that delicious bondage of drowsiness; and then, growing gradually louder, clearer, sharper, the sound of a man's passionate voice.

He pulled himself up suddenly at last, and sat with open eyes and ears listening to a speaker who was only divided from him by that screen of books. His chair was placed in the extreme angle formed by the bookcase and the wall, so that he was entirely hidden from any one in the centre of the room.

He awoke in time to hear the speaker say, 'You have heard of me perhaps, Lady Clevedon; my name is Richard Redmayne.'

He heard this, and all that followed this, and was quick to perceive that the farmer had taken Sir Francis Clevedon for Hubert Harcross.

'A strange turn for events to take,' he said to himself; 'and I should imagine very likely to lead up to a crisis. Now I know what kind of man this Redmayne is, I shall be able to tackle him. A passionate fellow, it seems; a fellow who would stick at nothing, I should think, when his blood is up.'

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He smiled—a slow meditative smile.

'Upon my word, I don't believe Mr. Harcross has heard the last of this Redmayne's daughter,' he thought, as he rose from his seat in the corner and peered cautiously into the room. It was quite empty; but Mr. Vallory preferred to make his retreat by the garden, whence he departed in quest of Richard Redmayne.

'I'll take the trouble to enlighten him as to the traitor's identity,' he said to himself. 'Francis Clevedon is a good fellow, and it's too bad that he should carry the burden of another man's sin upon his shoulders.'

He spent some time looking for Mr. Redmayne among the crowd, but failed to find him, and was ultimately pounced upon by Colonel Davenant and told-off upon some new duty of his stewardship, to his extreme aggravation.

When the shadows thickened in the wood Mr. Harcross and his companion went back to the lawn, where the talk and the laughter and the music had grown louder. The local band had now emerged from retirement, and were braying furiously, refreshed with strong drink, and more bold than care-

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ful in their instrumentation. Mr. Harcross and Jane Bond danced the Lancers in the twilight, while the lamps were being lighted in the wood, to the edification of Joseph Flood, who sat on a bench a little way off, biting his nails and watching them; and after the Lancers were over, Mr. Harcross gave Miss Bond a lesson in waltzing, the damsel having grown somewhat reckless by this time, and not caring whether her father did or did not see her indulging in this forbidden exercise. Mrs. Harcross, who was sauntering to and fro with a Kentish magnate, distinguished her husband's figure among the dancers. She was a little surprised that he should push the duty of his stewardship so far, but had no jealousy of rustic beauties, only a languid disapproval of so unnecessary a condescension. She might have approved had he been canvassing the county, and these people his constituents. And so the day waned, the coloured lamps shone out of the dusky branches of the trees and twinkled round the margins of the fountains. Youthful minds began to languish for the fireworks; more world-weary spirits had a too frequent recourse to the tents where refreshments were liberally dispensed. The Colonel began to grow a little uneasy in his mind as the crowd grew mer-

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rier. He had organised everything to perfection except the dispersal of his guests.

'But they'll all go directly after the fireworks, of course,' he said to Mr. Wort, who stood beside him at the entrance to the chief tent.

The steward groaned aloud.

'Go,' he said; 'yes, if I can find barrers enough to wheel 'em all away upon. That's about the only chance there is of their going, I take it.'

Joseph Flood had consumed his share of the strong ale dealt out to the thirsty dancers, had tried to drown the green-eyed monster in cool draughts of wholesome malt liquor; but the more he drowned that demon the stronger it grew, until the groom's brain was on fire, and his mind distracted with darker thoughts than had ever entered it before.

That first lesson in the divine art of waltzing, under the harvest moon, whose calm yellow splendour rose high above those lesser earthly lights of green and red and blue and silver twinkling among the dark foliage, that novel sensation of revolving gently to the sound of music with a strong arm clasping and sustaining her, was highly agreeable to Jane Bond; all the more agreeable on account of her conviction that her plighted lover was watching her from

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some coign of vantage in the background. Yes, this was something like dancing. How different from those jigging, jostling, jolting Sir Roger de Coverleys, which she had been taught to regard as the chiefest delight of Terpsichore! This was to live a new life, to feel her heart beating with a new motion.

Mr. Harcross danced well, although of late years he had taken to dance rarely. There had been a day when it was of some importance to him to be among the best waltzers in a ballroom. He had drunk more than he was accustomed to drink in the course of this festival day, and the influence of that unwonted indulgence made his waltzing somewhat wilder than the ordinary ballroom business. He told the bandmaster to play faster, and spun Miss Bond round the grassy circle, amidst a few breathless ladies'-maids with their labouring swains, in a waltz as furious as some unholy midnight dance of fiends and witches on the Blocksberg. The ladies'-maids and their exhausted partners broke down under the pace, and one couple after another dropped into the background, until Hubert Harcross and Jane Bond were spinning round alone in the summer moonlight.

The spectators applauded as the music ended with a sharp volley of chords, more or less together,

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and this last couple walked slowly away, side by side. Mr. Harcross, in sporting phraseology, had not turned a hair; but his partner was flushed and panting, and had somewhat of a Mænadic aspect in her streaming dress and loosened hair.

'I had no idea that waltzing was so beautiful,' said Jane breathlessly.

'I had no idea that you were so beautiful till I saw you under the moonlight,' retorted her partner, contemplating the handsome face and dishevelled hair, the florid beauty chastened by that mellow light, with a purely artistic admiration. 'You have a natural genius for waltzing; but you must have had some practice surely before to-night?'

'I have waltzed by myself sometimes in the garden, when I knew father was safe out of the way, and hummed the music all the time; but it makes one's breath go dreadful.'

'You have waltzed by yourself in the garden?' said Mr. Harcross, in a pitying tone. 'Poor little girl!'

This did really seem to him a pitiful picture—these yearnings for the pleasures of a bright unknown world, never to be gratified.

'What a pity there should be pretty girls in this

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walk of life!' he said to himself. 'Strange that a wise dispensation did not provide for their all being plain.'

He fetched a deep glass of lemonade for Miss Bond from one of the tents, and having provided her with this refreshment, stood by her irresolute, wondering what excuse he could make for leaving her to her own devices. He was somewhat weary of his stewardship, had toiled hard since noon, and would have been exceeding glad to slip away and smoke a quiet cigar in one of the dim old stone colonnades, which were not lighted with coloured lamps.

Miss Bond, however, having secured to herself an accomplished cavalier, was in nowise minded to let him depart until the fête was finished. At midnight the fairy dream would be ended, and she must be Cinderella again, without any hope of future queendom to result from a lost slipper; but in the mean while, since she had the prince for her cavalier, she did not intend to let him go lightly. Nor did she much relish the idea of encountering the outraged Joseph unprotected. There was an agreeable excitement in provoking his wrath, but the wrath itself was a thing to be avoided. She did not want to meet him until his jealousy had cooled a little, until

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he was in a state of mind to be soothed and wheedled into good-humour. Of her father she had no present fear, as a friendly dairymaid had informed her that he was safely bestowed with a little knot of gossips on a bench by the bowling-green, smoking and talking politics in a sober way, as became a pious nonconformist.

'You'll stop and show me the fireworks, won't you?' she asked Mr. Harcross, as if aware that he was meditating his escape.

'Do you think the catherine-wheels and the roman candles will be any better if I am by to expound them?' he asked, smiling, a little flattered even by this peasant girl's desire for his company, and yet yearning for a peaceful cigar.

'I'm sure I shall like them better,' replied Miss Bond. 'Do stay.'

'Of course I will stay, if you really wish it. And in that case, we may as well take a stroll in the moonlight. The fireworks will not begin for an hour. It is only just nine; and see how lovely the park looks over there, beyond those garish red and blue lamps, which remind me of my boyhood's paradise, Vauxhall.'

Miss Bond would have infinitely preferred to cir-

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culate among the crowd, with Mr. Harcross at her side, leaning on his arm perhaps, if he would only be polite enough to offer her that support, which he had not done since they finished their waltz. It was of very little use to have secured an aristocratic admirer, if she could not exhibit him before the envious eyes of her friends, the dairymaids and laundrymaids of Clevedon. She was not at all sentimentally inclined, and she could see the moonlit avenues of the park any night in the year from January to December, when there was a moon. But these many-coloured lamps twinkling among the branches, or festooned from bough to bough, she could not see. It seemed a foolish thing to turn one's back upon them for the contemplation of moonbeams and shadows.

She assented to Mr. Harcross's proposition graciously enough, notwithstanding, for she had perceived his desire to leave her, and was proud of having retained him by her side. They walked slowly along the grassy avenue, leaving all the glare and noise of the festival behind them, with nothing before them but the utter peacefulness and perfect beauty of the moonlit landscape.

Mr. Harcross was very silent. He had had quite enough of the toils of stewardship, and his thoughts

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had gone back to that one sad sweet memory which could not be banished in this scene. So sweet, so bitter, so sad was the remembrance, that it was an actual pain to think of it; and yet his fancies returned from every wandering track to hover round this one spot of memory. Even the girl by his side to-night, so common a piece of clay, so wearisome a companion, by very force of contrast reminded him of that other one whose company had never been tedious, whose innocent lips had never shaped a sordid thought.

'I must get back to London at once, and start for Norway or some uncivilised place, where I shall be in danger of my life, and shall have no time for brooding,' he said to himself. 'I must make an end of this holiday-making somehow. It is murderous work. I think a week more of this neighbourhood and these memories would be the death of me. I must invent some excuse for leaving to-morrow, whether Augusta likes it or not; and since she has chosen to make herself the supreme consideration, she must not be surprised if I too consult my own inclinations. She can stay here, and satisfy society. But *I* go to-morrow, come what may.'

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CHAPTER X.

'DO EVIL DEEDS THUS QUICKLY COME TO END?'

AFTER that interview with Lady Clevedon in the library, Richard Redmayne went in search of Sir Francis, but did not succeed in discovering him among the crowd. The twilight deepened into night, and he was still looking for his enemy in a desultory way, pausing to refresh himself with strong drink in one of the tents, speaking to no one, and receiving very slight notice from the busy pleasure-seekers, who were all intent on their own enjoyment. He was quite alone in that joyous crowd; he drank his liquor in moody silence, and departed as he came, to renew the search for that man whom he so desired to meet face to face.

When he came out of the tent, the lamps were all twinkling in the dusky boughs, the crowd at its gayest, the music at its loudest. The dazzle and confusion of the scene troubled his overcharged brain. He stood for some time looking about him with a

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perplexed air. He had lived by himself ever since he came to England, and had come straight from those remote colonial pastures where the stranger's foot rarely trod. It was a new thing to find himself amidst a herd of men and women, talking, laughing, dancing, by the light of a thousand coloured lamps, to the sound of joyous music. He looked at the scene for some little time, half stupefied by its unfamiliar brightness; then turned suddenly away from all this riot, and plunged into the cool depths of the park, where the fern grew up to his knees.

He walked some distance, neither looking nor caring where he went, and only stopped when he stumbled across a prostrate figure lying at his very feet.

A poacher perhaps; yet it was scarcely a night to be selected by any marauder with felonious intentions towards the game. The full moon and the festival together were strong reasons against the wiring of hares or the illegal slaughter of pheasants.

Mr. Redmayne stooped down to examine the individual who had become an obstacle in his path. It was a man lying face downwards among the fern, with his hat off, and his forehead resting on his folded arms.

'What's up, my lad?' said Richard Redmayne,

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somewhat alarmed by his attitude. 'Is there anything amiss?'

'Yes, there is,' answered the man, raising himself from the fern with a sullen air, and then stooping to pick up a gun which had lain beside him. 'Yes, there is something amiss; but nothing you can mend, unless you know any cure for a woman's vanity and fickleness.'

The speaker was Joseph Flood, the groom.

'What are you doing with that gun?' Mr. Redmayne demanded sternly.

'What's that to you?'

'You've been after the birds.'

'No, I haven't.'

'Then what can you want with a gun?'

'O, I don't know. It might come handy, if I wanted to use it.'

'Is it loaded?'

'Yes, with swan-shot. Let it alone, can't you?'

'You've no business prowling about here with a loaded gun.'

'Haven't I? Have you any business prowling about here without a gun? I'm a servant up at the house yonder—Sir Francis Clevedon's own groom—and I've a right to be here if I please.'

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'Not with that gun.'

'How do you know that? It's my own gun. Perhaps I wanted a pop at the wild-fowl down by the water yonder. There's some snipe, I've heard say.'

'You don't want swan-shot for snipe.'

'I'm not particular. Suppose I wanted to wing one of the cygnets, to get a feather for my sweetheart's hat, you'd have no objection, I suppose, though you are so anxious about what don't anyways concern you?'

Richard Redmayne looked at the young man doubtfully. There was something queer about his manner; but that might mean very little. He had been drinking most likely, and his predatory instincts had been stimulated by the drink. It mattered very little what he meant or did not mean, Richard Redmayne thought; so he let him go without farther questioning, but was curious enough to watch where he went, and to follow him at a little distance.

The groom went in and out among the trees by a circuitous track, till he came to a classic temple on a little knoll, a somewhat dilapidated edifice, faced with stucco, which had peeled off in patches, leaving the brickwork bare. The charitable ivy, which covers and beautifies decay, had crept about the Doric pillars;

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the spider had woven his web from column to column; the swallow had made his nest under the cornice. It was one of the fancies upon which Sir Lucas had wasted his substance, and Sir Francis intended to restore or demolish it as soon as his leisure and his purse permitted. In the mean time, it was sufficiently picturesque under the moonlight.

Here Mr. Flood deposited his gun, in a convenient hiding-place, under a stone bench which had been provided for the repose of the wanderer—a bench on which lovers might sit hand in hand as one sees them in ancient engravings — Lavinia in a scanty petticoat, Eugenius in a tie-wig. Richard Redmayne saw him put away the gun, and then depart by the opposite way, whistling as he went, but not merrily. When he had watched the young man out of sight, Mr. Redmayne mounted the little knoll, and seated himself on the steps of the temple.

He had his cutty-pipe in his pocket, so he was able to solace himself, or, at any rate, to tranquillise himself, with the aid of that comforter. He sat smoking in the soft summer moonlight, his figure half hidden by the shadow of the columns on each side of him and the cornice above his head. He sat and smoked, watching the blue rings of vapour wind

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slowly upwards in the clear air, with his mind full of gloomy thoughts, yet with a grim sense of satisfaction nevertheless.

He had found his man. The long hunt, which had seemed so hopeless even to the professional hunter, had come to an end. He had found his man. It was only a question of an hour or so less or more when he should stand face to face with his daughter's destroyer. And then—what then? What was to come of their meeting? He would accuse him, denounce him, disgrace him in the estimation of every honest man and woman; mark him out for all time to come as a liar and a seducer; set against the name he was doubtless proud of as foul a dishonour as ever blotted the reputation of a gentleman! But would this satisfy his long-cherished hunger for revenge? Would this slake that bitter thirst which had tormented him for years? Would this exorcise the demon of his dreams—give him peaceful slumbers in nights to come—a smooth pillow for his dying head? Would this set his angry heart at rest, and soothe his grief? A thousand times, no! Could words, empty words, avenge his daughter? Must he not have heavier payment than those?

What was it he had thought of far away, upon

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those distant hill-tops, amidst the sources of those wider rivers that flow from the Cordilleras to the sea — in that wild solitude where Nature's lonely grandeur seems to widen the soul of man—what had he thought of there, when he brooded on the day which should bring him face to face with his daughter's destroyer? Not of a vengeance made up of words, assuredly, mere empty breath, frothy threatenings that must end in nothing. What was the vow which he had vowed upon those empty hills, with a savage world around him and savage instincts stirring in his breast? He knew but too well what it was. It hardly needed the strong liquor he had drunk that day to rekindle that long-smouldering fire. The smothered embers had never grown cold; a breath was enough to fan them into white heat.

He had a brace of revolvers in his bedroom at Brierwood. He had bought them at Melbourne, after his second outward voyage, for self-defence, in the first instance, and with a legitimate motive enough, but not without a lurking thought of some distant day when he might find a deadly use for them. He had hung them up by his bedside, and had contemplated them meditatively many a time, in the pause that a better or a happier man might have given to

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his prayers; had turned on his pillow often in the cold gray dawn to look at them, with a grisly satisfaction.

He thought of his pistols now, as he sat on the moss-grown steps of the Doric temple deliberating his revenge. He would have given half his estate to have had one of those grim companions lying snug in his coat-pocket. Yet how should he have thought of bringing such weapons to a rustic festival—to the birthday feast of the model squire? His thoughts went to the gun lying under the stone bench loaded with swan-shot.

'What did that fellow want with his gun out here to-night?' he wondered, but did not perplex himself long with that question. His universe was filled with his own great wrong. He had no concern to spare for another man's business, were it ever so desperate. He would hardly have stepped out of his own path to-night to prevent an assassination.

He filled his pipe a second time and smoked it out, and that purpose which had been cloudy and dim at first assumed a sharper outline.

Accuse him, denounce him, disgrace him? No. He would do what he swore to do on the day he discovered his daughter's fate—he would keep faith with

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himself, and with her shade. Of after consequences, of the price which he should have to pay society or his God, for this bitter-sweet revenge, he thought no more than he might have done had he been the darkest among pagans, and alone with his foe in an untrodden world where human justice was unknown. And having fully made up his mind upon this point, he sat and smoked his third pipe with a gloomy tranquillity, like a contented savage who has made tracks for his enemy's lair, and sits lurking in the shade of the gum-trees beside his wigwam, waiting till the unconscious victim shall come out and be tomahawked. Yet he had no suspicion that his victim was very near him, was destined to smooth his way to that dark deed which had now taken its full form and pressure in his mind. Of the when and where the thing was to be done he had no notion; he only knew that so soon as his opportunity came he would do it.

The harvest moon rose higher, the clear pure night air grew still clearer, and that magical light which has a deeper charm, a more thrilling beauty than any glory of sunshine, spread itself over the enchanted woodland: a landscape which by day would have been comparatively commonplace, like unto many other pictures which adorn the earth, became poetical in

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its calm beauty. Richard Redmayne thought of Bulrush Meads, and the moonlights he had seen there; thought of that fond dream which he had once dreamed, of his daughter Grace installed as the young queen of that fertile valley, of those far-spreading hills, fifteen hundred feet above the sea-level. It was all over, the dream. He should never see Bulrush Meads, the new home which he had beautified, any more, and the old home for which he had toiled and suffered had lost its glamour. Without Grace, Brierwood was worse than a desert; without Grace, the Australian homestead was only a strange dwelling across the barren sea. It seemed to him that he had lost his place and business on this earth, in losing her. He had lived only to satisfy his appetite for revenge; had been nourished and sustained by that very hunger, like that monster which makes the meat it feeds on.

He felt himself to-night something more than a man, with a man's passions and a man's weakness and uncertainty; felt like a being foredoomed to accomplish a certain end. If he had known anything of those old Greek stories, in which the men seem shadows moving to the music of the Fates, he might have fancied some likeness between himself and those awful figures,

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destiny-impelled, for ever trending blindly to one fore-ordained issue.

A distant clock chimed the half hour after nine. That sound pierced the stillness of the wood, although the vulgar dance music and the noise of many voices did not penetrate these shadowy aisles. So early! He felt as if he had lived half a lifetime since Sir Francis Clevedon came into the tent.

His third pipe was half smoked out when he heard the faintest rustle of the fern in the distance; then saw the glimmer of a woman's dress, white under the moonbeams; then heard a woman's laugh, and a man's voice answering it; and then two figures coming towards him—a girl with a man walking by her side, bending down with an air as of a lover to speak to her.

He laid down his pipe and watched them—at first idly, then with a sharp sudden interest, afterwards with a savage intensity. He crouched lower upon the steps of the temple, his strong right arm stretched itself stealthily across the broken stone floor, his fingers groped under the bench amongst weeds and rubbish, and clutched the groom's gun. He drew it out, examined the lock and priming, and then carried it to his shoulder, and took a deliberate aim.

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He had had plenty of exercise for his gun in Australia, when with empty heart and idle brain he tramped the woods and hills from sunrise to sunset, only anxious to get rid of his joyless day.

The girl and her companion came nearer,—the girl a mere peasant, he could see plainly enough; but the man a gentleman, whose face he fancied he knew as well as he knew his own. With what an air he bent to speak to her, and how the poor fool drank in his baleful flatteries! A man who lived only to play the seducer, thought Richard Redmayne. Was it not a righteous deed to rid the earth of such vermin? They came to within about twenty feet of the temple, neither of them looking to the right or the left. The man walked on that side of the grassy alley nearest the knoll, the girl on his right hand. When they were conveniently close to him, Richard Redmayne fired, covering the man's breast with his gun.

He dropped face downwards on the grass: the girl looked round her wildly for a moment, gave a shrill piercing scream, and fell on her knees at his side. Rick Redmayne flung the gun into a ferny hollow, and walked quietly away.

'I am glad I have done it,' he said.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE WRONG MAN.

No one hindered Richard Redmayne's exit from Clevedon Park. His boyish experiences of nutting and squirrel-hunting had made him familiar with every hillock and hollow, with every clump of hawthorn or thicket of hazel. He knew of a ladder and stile on the south wall by which he could descend upon the Kingsbury road, a spot at which there was little chance of meeting any one even to-night.

He did not stop to consider this, however, even for a moment. There was nothing of the criminal's headlong flight in his swift departure. His business was accomplished, and he went away. That was all. How long or how brief might be the interval that must elapse before he should be called to account for this night's work, he cared very little. That he should be called to account, sooner or later, he considered inevitable. He was prepared to stand by what he had done, ay, even on the scaffold.

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As to the fatal result of his deliberate fire, he had little doubt. His Australian life had made his hand too sure for any uncertainty upon this point. The marksman who had never failed to bring down the bird that seemed but a speck of shadow in the blue ether could hardly have missed the breast of a man at thirty paces. And he had seen his victim fall with the heavy leaden drop of a creature wounded to the death.

Was he sorry for what he had done? Did he regret that one swift instantaneous act by which he had separated himself for ever from the ranks of his fellow-men, and placed himself in the brotherhood of Cain? No, he was not sorry; but exultant rather, as having accomplished his earthly mission. He looked up at the stars and fancied his daughter in some unknown world beyond them, and could almost have lifted up his voice in the still night, to tell her that her wrongs were avenged.

The first of the sky-rockets shot up above the trees as he climbed the ladder. He stood for a few minutes on the highest step, watching the swift ascending stars, the showers of falling light.

'They don't know anything yet,' he thought, 'or they wouldn't let off their fireworks.'

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He waited and watched for more light in the sky above Clevedon Park, but after those few rockets, which had followed one another in quick succession, there was nothing. The sky remained blank, or only peopled by those sublimer stars which are happily fixtures.

He dropped down into the empty road, and crossed over to a meadow path that would take him to the cross cut by which he had come to Clevedon in the morning. He did not hasten his steps with the air of a man who fancies himself hunted by mortal pursuers, nor did he rush onward blindly, as if the furies that wait on such deeds as his were already in pursuit of him. He took his time, and was perhaps cooler on this return journey than he had been when he came to Clevedon, or at any rate more resolute. He had done what he wanted to do, that was the grand point. The time might come when his mind would be awakened to the enormity of his crime; but in this present hour he felt no more compunction than if he had slain a beast of prey.

It was close upon eleven o'clock when he came to Brierwood, letting himself into the garden by the meadow path. What an awful stillness there was in the old house as he went in, and how the empty

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floors resounded under his tread! He thought of the night of his first return from Australia, when his heart had beat high with the fond expectation of finding his daughter's arms clasped round his neck, his daughter's fair young head nestling upon his breast. O miserable night, O bitter grief! was the payment which he had taken just now one whit too heavy for the anguish of that unforgotten hour?

'Could I do less than kill him?' he said to himself with a conviction that there was justice in the deed. He did not light a candle in the kitchen, or settle himself in the sitting-room which he was accustomed to occupy, but went straight upstairs to his bedroom and flung himself on his bed. That, under cover of this night which he was thus wasting, he might have got clear away from the scene of his crime, and secured his escape from its consequences, was a fact which never for a moment occupied his consideration. He would stand by the deed that he had done. To have fled ignominiously, leaving some innocent person to suffer for his act, would be indeed to convert that which he had deemed a sacrifice into a murder. He waited calmly for the issue of the night's work. He thought as he lay down how that consummate scoundrel had once rested on this bed, had lain here plot-

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ting the ruin of the daughter of the house; and he thought, with a savage sense of satisfaction, of that couch on which he lay to-night, and how blank and dreary was his slumber.

'Surely such men must have bad dreams when they are dead,' he said to himself.

Not very long did he lie awake to meditate upon his crime or his victim. He had drunk a good deal at Clevedon, had been longer on foot and in the open air than he had been accustomed to be of late. His meditations wandered off into a tangle of broken thoughts before his head had rested long upon his pillow, and when Kingsbury church-clock chimed the half-hour after eleven, he was sleeping as peacefully as a child.

What a strange thing it seemed to wake next morning, soon after daybreak, to look round him wonderingly for a few minutes, staring idly at the sunlit chamber, and then to recall, as it were in one flash, the events of the previous night! It came back to him—the scene in the wood—vivid as in the moment of its enactment; and still he was not sorry for what he had done. He felt some touch of sorrow for that gentle pretty-looking young wife, who had stood by

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her husband so bravely, and who must needs be the chief victim in this tragedy; but for the man he had slain he felt neither regret nor pity; for the position in which he had placed himself he suffered no compunction. If the business of last night must be atoned for on the scaffold, he was prepared to make the atonement, to die that shameful death for his daughter's sake.

It was only five o'clock when he went downstairs and out into the garden. The Bushes, exhausted by unaccustomed dissipation, still slumbered.

'I shall hear enough about last night's work when Mrs. Bush comes down, I daresay,' he said to himself; and he walked about the garden smoking his pipe until that time should arrive, with no shade of alteration in his habitual aspect, neither paler nor redder, neither graver nor more excited, than he was wont to be.

He made the circuit of the garden several times, casting a look at the kitchen windows every now and then, expecting to see the industrious matron fling the lattices open, or to behold her emerge from the kitchen-door with her pail to fetch water for the morning's purifications. He had walked and smoked and meditated for nearly an hour and a half, how-

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ever, before the lattices opened and Mrs. Bush's homely countenance appeared, picturesquely framed by the Virginian creeper that covered this end of the house.

'You're rather late this morning, arn't you, Mrs. Bush?' inquired Richard Redmayne, coming over the grass towards the open window.

'Late, Mr. Redmayne,' exclaimed the matron, 'well I may be late! I'm sure I wonder as I was able to get off my bed this morning, which my poor inside has not left off twittering ever since a quarter past ten o'clock last night; and I'm sure it was nothing as I eat or drank yesterday, for no one could have been more moderate; and Bush was as sober as a judge, and quite low-spirited like after dinner, and shed tears when Sir Francis Clevedon's health was drunk. No, Mr. Redmayne, it wasn't what we took as turned our insides; it was the awful turn as that poor dear gentleman's death gave us just as the fireworks were a-beginning to go off.'

'What gentleman? What do you mean?'

'Lor, Mr. Redmayne, it can't be as you don't know what happened sure*ly!* My goodman saw you coming out of the tenants' markwee, and he come to me and says it did his heart good to see you'd made

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up your mind to enjoy yourself like the rest of the world, for once in a way.'

'Yes, I took it into my head to go all of a sudden; but I felt like a fish out of water, and came away soon after dinner.'

'What? Then you don't know—' gasped Mrs. Bush, staring at him.

'I don't know what?'

'Anything about the poor gentleman that was killed in the park near the old stone summer-house as Sir Lucas built?'

'A gentleman killed!' said Richard Redmayne deliberately. 'That was curious.'

'Curious, Mr. Redmayne! Don't say curious; it was dreadful. He must have dropped down dead instanteously, I heard say; and no one knows who did it—whether it was poachers or jealousy; for he had been talking to that bold young hussy Bond's daughter all the afternoon, and she's got a'most as many sweethearts as she has fingers and toes. And his poor wife they said went down like a stone when they carried him up to the terrace, where she was standing with the rest of the company.'

'Ah, poor soul,' said Richard thoughtfully; 'I'm sorry for her. Yes, I'm sorry for Lady Clevedon.'

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'Lady Clevedon!' echoed Mrs. Bush; 'yes, it do come hard upon her too, of course. A ninquis, and a funeral, and all; and all her visitors about her; and Sir Francis's birthday too.'

'His birthday; yes,' said Mr. Redmayne, with a short laugh; 'I don't suppose when he made such a fuss about his birthday he reckoned it was to be his last.'

'Lor, Mr. Redmayne! how can you say so? Why should it be his last? I suppose you mean as it's the last time he'll be likely to give us all such a treat, after it's winding-up with his friend's being murdered.'

'*His friend murdered!* What do you mean? It was Sir Francis Clevedon who was shot last night.'

'Sir Francis Clevedon! Lord a-mercy on us, Mr. Redmayne, what can have put such a horrid notion into your head? I'm sure I never said anything about Sir Francis. The Lord forbid!'

'Not Sir Francis? Why, you must be mad, woman! It *was* Sir Francis!'

'You must be losing your poor dear senses, Mr. Redmayne,' said Mrs. Bush, in a soothing tone, being always inclined to believe that her employer had, in Australian parlance, 'a shingle short.' 'I never said

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a syllable about Sir Francis. It was a friend of his that was killed—a gentleman from London—a Mr. 'Arsomething — I know his name begins with a haitch.'

Richard Redmayne walked slowly away, speechless. Was he really mad to-day, or had he been mad last night, his senses distraught, his eyes beholding things that were not? So surely as he was a living man he had seen the face in the miniature turned towards him in the broad moonlight, the same face, line for line, hardly less distinctly seen than in the full glare of day.

Had he been the victim of some hideous delusion, had his brain been bemused by strong drink, when he fired that fatal gun, and had he slain an innocent man in his madness? Such a catastrophe seemed to him too horrible for possibility. Yet Francis Clevedon lived, Grace remained unavenged, and he was an assassin.

'I won't trust that woman's word,' he said to himself, after a long pause; 'it's more likely her brain's muddled this morning than that I didn't know what I was doing last night. I'll look into the business myself.'

He lost no time in setting about this personal

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investigation, but walked off at once by the field path towards Clevedon. Yet before he had gone far he changed his mind, remembering that Kingsbury was much nearer, and that he might hear all he wanted to hear in that village.

He could see that the place was astir with some unusual excitement before he had crossed the common. There was a much larger group of idlers at the door of the Coach and Horses than the customary knot of gossips. A couple of chaise-carts were halting before the trough between the two tall elms opposite the inn; a man on horseback was standing before Mr. Wort's garden-gate. Richard Redmayne walked straight across to this gate, not caring for the indirect information to be gained from village gossips when he might interrogate the steward himself.

'Is Mr. Wort indoors?' he asked the man on horseback, who had a semi-official air. Mr. Redmayne smiled grimly to himself as he thought that this man might belong to the constabulary, and be on the look-out for the assassin.

'I don't mind swinging for the man who killed my daughter,' he thought; 'but it would be hard lines to be hung for a blunder.'

'Yes, Mr. Wort's in his office; but there's a

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gentleman with him, and he's busy,' the man answered, without looking to the right or the left.

'I can't help that,' said Mr. Redmayne; 'I must see him.'

He went into the little shed of an office, which he had not entered since that night of his first coming home when he had said hard things to the steward. He went in coolly enough, and found John Wort in close conference with a grave-looking middle-aged man, who had the bearing of a soldier in plain clothes, and who was the chief of the Tunbridge police-station.

'I can't speak to any one now,' Mr. Wort said hurriedly; and then recognising the new-comer with a start, 'What, Redmayne, is it you? What the devil brings you here this morning?'

'I want to know what has happened at Clevedon. Everybody seems to have gone crazy. I can't get a straight answer anywhere.'

'I should think everybody must know what has happened within twenty mile of Kingsbury; there's been talk enough. There was a brutal murder in Clevedon Park last night, Richard Redmayne; a man shot like a rabbit; that's what has happened.'

'But who was the man?' cried Richard savagely;

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'that's what I want to know! Can't you give him his name?'

'His name was Harcross,' Mr. Wort answered gravely. 'And now I don't suppose you are much wiser than you were before, for he was a stranger down here.'

'Harcross — Harcross!' Richard Redmayne repeated, with a stupefied look. 'They told me it was Sir Francis Clevedon was shot last night.'

'Then they must have been clean daft, whoever they were,' exclaimed the steward impatiently; 'and now perhaps you'll leave me alone with this gentleman; for we've got some business to settle between us.'

Richard Redmayne walked out of the office without a word. It would profit him nothing to ask any farther questions. He had slain the wrong man; that was horribly certain. He had burdened his soul with a useless crime; dyed his hands in the blood of a fellow-creature who had never injured him. He hardly knew where to go, or what to do with himself, after leaving John Wort's office. His whole life seemed a series of blunders. If he had taken his daughter to Australia with him as she had so piteously entreated him to do, he might have had her for his comfort and delight to-day; if he had never re-

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turned from his second voyage, he would have at least escaped this unnecessary crime. Now, for the first time, he felt himself a murderer. He took the high road to Clevedon, tramping along the dusty way in the morning sunshine, unconscious of fatigue. He wanted to know something more, he hardly knew what, only to be more and more certain of his own folly. To think that his senses had so befooled him! Sir Francis Clevedon lived and triumphed, laughed perhaps in his soul at the thought of this egregious blunder, and an innocent man lay dead, slain untimely by his wicked hand.

At the south lodge he found Joshua Bond, the gardener, two or three other out-of-door servants, and a knot of accidental idlers, discussing the catastrophe. Jane Bond was lying upstairs in her bedroom in a high fever, induced by the horror of the previous night.

'And may it be a chastening and a blessing to her,' said the gardener, 'a warning to repent, and turn from the paths of foolishness!'

'Do you suspect anybody of having a hand in it?' asked an elderly man, proprietor of *the* shop at Hubbleford.

'There was but one hand in it, Mr. Perkis,' replied the gardener solemnly—'the hand that drew

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the trigger. I don't deny that I have my own thoughts upon the subject, Mr. Perkis; but I tell them to no man. Time will show.'

'Is he to be buried down here?' inquired the curious Perkis.

'No. He's to be taken up to London to-night, to be buried in his wife's family vault at Kensal-green.'

'That's a pity,' said Perkis. 'There'd have been half the county to follow, if they'd buried him at Kingsbury. Murders in London are as plentiful as blackberries, judging from the Sunday papers. He won't get so much honour paid him there.'

They went on to discuss the probable issue of the coroner's inquest, which was to take place at two o'clock that day — the nature of the death-wound, and the weapon that had inflicted it, about which points there were divers opinions, no exact knowledge having yet penetrated to the world outside Clevedon Hall. Richard Redmayne stood by and listened, but said nothing, except when he was appealed to by Mr. Perkis or the gardener, who addressed themselves to him occasionally as a point of politeness.

'The police are on the right tract, you may depend upon it,' said Perkis; 'you always see that in

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the newspapers. The police are on the tract; and although nothink is known for certing, they hopes soon to be able to put their hand upon the right party, being in possession of hinformation which they don't feel theirselves at liberty to devulge. That's what they always tells you in the papers; and depend upon it, Mr. Bond, the police are on the tract in this case. Do you think it was a gun or a pistol that it was done with?'

'Captain Hardwood's groom was down here before breakfast exercising that skittish mare of his master's, and he told me the doctors had extracted half-a-dozen swan-shot; so it must have been a gun, and it must have been done by some one that didn't plan it beforehand. No man would load his gun with swan-shot to commit a murder.'

'There's no knowing, Mr. Bond,' replied Perkis, with a suggestive air. 'The worst a man is, the more artfuller he goes about his wickedness. The swan-shot may have been meant to throw parties off the scent. But what I can't make out is the motive. There never was a crime without a motive.'

'Unless it was done by a madman,' said the gardener. 'This murder seems like a madman's murder, to my mind.'

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'Don't say that, Mr. Bond; that's what I call flying in the face of the law of the land. A man has only got to do something more atrociouser than the common run, and he gets put down for a lunatic.'

Richard Redmayne stood among them for a little while, listening idly, and then moved towards the park, intending to revisit the scene of last night's tragedy; but at this point the gardener stopped him.

'I beg your pardon, Mr. Redmayne,' he said—'of course you're not a stranger—but I've had strict orders from the police, and I'm obliged to act by them. Nobody is to go into the park to-day.'

'Why not?'

'I don't know the why or the wherefore; but it's the police that give the order, and we're all bound to abide by it.'

'Of course. It doesn't matter; I'm not curious about the business. But if any one was suspected, or taken to prison, or anything of that kind, I should like to know. You might send some one down to Brierwood and let me know.'

'Very well, Mr. Redmayne; I'll send you word if anything happens.'

A lad came up at this moment, bursting with self-importance—the rapture of possessing informa-

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tion as yet unshared by these village worthies. The men recognised him by his aspect as the bearer of tidings.

'Well, Jim, any more news?'

'I should think there were, indeed,' replied the youth, swelling as he spoke. 'They've been and found the gun as it was done with.'

'Ah!' said Mr. Bond, 'they've found the gun, have they? Then the rest is easy work. They'll soon find the man that fired it.'

He watched Richard Redmayne meditatively as he walked away from the gates and along the white high-road.

'Strange that he should take such an interest in the business as to want a special message sent him, isn't it?' he remarked.

'Yes, it is, Bond,' replied Mr. Perkis; 'but since he come home from Australia there ain't a stranger man going than Rick Redmayne. It's that blessed gold out yonder as turns their brains, that's my belief. It ain't natural that a man should dig gold out of the earth, just as if it was mangold-wurzel; and if a man goes against nature, he must expect to pay the penalty of his opposition.'

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'True,' ejaculated Mr. Bond. 'In the sweat of his brow—that's what the Scripture says; there's nothing about gold-digging and hundred-weight nuggets there.'

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CHAPTER XII.

'YES, BROTHER, CURSE WITH ME THAT BALEFUL HOUR.'

AN awful gloom and silence, as of the grave itself, had fallen upon Clevedon Hall. No merry click of billiard-balls, no little gushes of silvery laughter, no bass accompaniment of masculine voices, blending with and sustaining the sweet feminine trebles; no dashing performance of Chopin or Schuloff on the grand piano in the drawing room; no melodious tinkling of waltzes on the smaller pianos in upper chambers consecrated to the fairer guests; no flutter of silken draperies in halls and on staircases; none of that pleasing bustle which pervades a house full of guests; only dusky rooms, from which the sunlight was scrupulously banished—only gloom and silence and horror and despair.

The majority of Lady Clevedon's visitors had already taken to themselves wings, and departed by the earliest morning trains, leaving scared maids and unwilling valets to bring their belongings after them.

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Who could care to linger on a scene that had been defiled by the red hand of murder? The fine old Elizabethan mansion, smiling in the clear morning light across a broad sweep of dewy lawn, seemed to those departing guests like a monstrous charnel-house, behind whose stately walls there lurked all the unutterable horrors of the grave. The visitors fled as soon as possible after daybreak, leaving epistles grateful and sympathetic for their host or hostess, as the case might be, feeling sure that, at such a time, dear Lady Clevedon would rather be alone; and so on, and so on.

'Egad, you see, if a fellow stopped, he might find himself accused of the murder,' said Captain Hardwood confidentially to the *fidus Achates* of the moment. 'I think I shall look out for some German Spa, where the extradition treaty doesn't hold good, or charter a two-hundred-ton yacht and do the South-Sea Islands. I'm told there's no end of fun to be had in the Pacific.'

The Clevedon servants had been swift to clear away all traces of the festival that had come to so evil an ending. Faded garlands had been whisked into chaos, gay draperies and decorations gathered up into bundles and carried away, and the rooms looked

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grand and solemn in their dusky emptiness. The murdered man lay upstairs in the bedchamber which he had occupied as a guest, and a bed had been hastily put up for his wife in the dressing-room adjoining. Here she sat alone—an awful statue-like figure, with a face as white as that hidden face in the next room—sat with hands locked on her knee, and fixed eyes looking into space.

Lady Clevedon had offered to bear her company through that dismal night and in that dreary hopeless noontide—had even implored permission to sit with her, standing outside the door, and pleading with tears, 'Dear Mrs. Harcross, do let me be with you. I won't speak, I won't worry you; only let me sit by your side.' Augusta only shook her head, and motioned dumbly to her maid to answer for her. Tullion, the maid, she suffered to be with her, as she would have suffered a dog—a creature whose presence or absence could make no difference.

She had seen him laid upon his bed at midnight; had stood quietly by while the surgeons examined his wounds; had refused to be banished from that death-chamber with so stern a resolution, that they had been obliged to succumb and let her stay; and when all was done, she wandered to and fro between the

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rooms, or sat silent as she was sitting now, like humanity transformed into marble. How fondly, how entirely she had loved him! She had known always that he was very dear to her, but not till now had she estimated the full force of her passion. She had lived her own life—had chosen for herself an existence of dressing and visiting and receiving, had made her public and official career the all-absorbing business of her life—and yet she had loved this man with all her heart and soul. Only she had kept her affection under lock and key, in a cold cautious spirit; she had feared to trust him with the whole sum of her love, any more than she trusted him with her fortune; she had kept her heart settled upon herself, as it were, for her own separate use and maintenance. It was enough for him to know that she had condescended to become his wife, that he was not obnoxious to her. The passion, the depth, the ardour of her love she held in reserve.

She thought of all this now that he was dead, and knew that she had cheated him, and had cheated herself even more utterly—cheated herself of the love that she might have won had she been generous enough to confess her own fondness, if she had been less intent upon receiving her due, less anxious to

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measure her tenderness by his affection, and even then to give him somewhat short measure. He was dead; and it seemed to her now as if he had made up the sum of her existence, as if this one figure, of which at the best she had seen very little, had filled her world; that the dressing and visiting had been the merest formulæ, the petty filling-up of empty spaces in her life, all subservient to her love for him and her pride in him. She knew now how fondly she had built on his future—the distinction he was to win for her, the pinnacle they were to occupy side by side in days to come. He was gone, and the future was a blank. 'What am I without him?' she asked herself piteously. Her youth and wealth and beauty counted as nothing now that he was no more.

His loss was in itself a calamity so overwhelming that, in this first stage of her grief at least, she thought little of the manner in which he had died. The one fact that he was taken from her filled her mind to the exclusion of every other consideration. How was she to live without him? That was the all-absorbing question. Accustomed from babyhood to consider herself the beginning and end of creation—or, at least, of so much of creation as at all concerned her—she thought now of this awful event only as it

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affected her own interests and her own feelings. She thought—yes, even in this first day of her widowhood, while she sat speechless, the very type and image of despair—she thought of the house in Mastodon-crescent, and how useless its splendours would be to her henceforward. Could *she* bring the lights of the legal world, the stars and celebrities of the town, to that luxurious mansion? Could *she* give dinners that should be talked about, or make her *cordon bleu* an aid to her ascent of Fortune's ladder? Alas, no, the light was extinguished. She was only a rich widow, whom the world—saving perchance some few adventurous spirits in need of rich wives—would surely hasten to forget. It had been a pleasant thing to fancy Hubert Harcross only an attendant upon her steps, best known as the husband of the handsome Miss Vallory; but in this awful hour of enlightenment, it dawned upon her that it was she who had been the satellite.

The preparation of the bed in the dressing-room had been lost labour. Not once during that dismal night did Mrs. Harcross lie down, although Tullion implored her to try to rest a little—to sleep, if possible.

'Don't worry me!' she exclaimed impatiently,

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with hot dry lips that would scarcely shape the words. 'I am not very likely to sleep for months to come.'

At noon on the day after the murder, Sir Francis came to beg for a brief interview. There was a tiny boudoir opening out of the dressing-room, a mere slip of a room, which had once been an oratory, but was now furnished with a couple of tapestried arm-chairs, a writing-table in the window, and a dainty little bookcase. Sir Francis begged that he might see Mrs. Harcross for a few minutes in this room. After some carrying to and fro of messages by Tullion, and after at first positively refusing to see any one, she consented with a weary air, and rose to go to the room where Sir Francis was waiting for her.

'You'll put on a fresh morning dress, won't you, ma'am?' gasped Tullion, aghast at the idea of her mistress appearing in tumbled muslin and crushed valenciennes, even at this juncture; but Mrs. Harcross put her aside impatiently, and went into the boudoir, a ghost-like figure, in limp white robes, with loose hair falling on her shoulders.

Sir Francis was standing by the open window, darkened by closed Venetian shutters, through which the summer light stole softly, tempered with shadow.

'My dear Mrs. Harcross,' he said gently, 'we are

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all so sorry for you. I have no words to express what we feel; and words are so idle at such a time. But I thought it best, even at the risk of paining you, to plead for this interview. There are some things that must be spoken about, and that cannot be spoken of too soon.'

'O God!' she cried, looking at him fixedly, with despairing eyes, 'you are so like him!'

'Good heavens!' thought Sir Francis, 'what a dolt I was to forget the likeness! I ought not to have come near her yet awhile.'

He placed a chair for her by the open window.

'Let my likeness to your lost husband constitute a claim upon your friendship,' he said, 'and trust in my earnest desire, my determination, to see justice done upon his assassin. I want you to help us in this, if you can. You may be able to furnish some clue to this most mysterious crime. Had your husband any enemy? Do you know of any one he can have offended—any one desperate enough to do such a deed?'

'No,' she answered, 'I know of no one whom he had ever injured. I never heard that he had an enemy. But I know that he had a dislike to coming to this place, and I made him come.'

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'He had a dislike to coming here?'

'He objected strongly, and had good reasons for his objection, though I cannot tell them to you. If he had trusted me in the first instance, if he had only told me the truth at once, we should not have come. But I brought him here against his will,—brought him to meet his death.'

Sir Francis looked at her wonderingly, half inclined to think that her mind was wandering.

'You can give me no clue, then, dear Mrs. Harcross?' he asked gently.

'None.'

'Then we must work on without your help. The police have been busy since daybreak; they have communicated with the stations all along the line, and any suspicious-looking person will be stopped. We have telegraphed to Scotland-yard for a couple of detectives, and I have telegraphed to Ryde for Mr. Vallory. I thought you would like to have your father with you at such a time.'

'My father can do no good here,' said Augusta listlessly; and then she went on with a sudden intensity of tone and manner, 'Yes, you must find out who murdered him. It is *your duty*.'

'My dear Mrs. Harcross, I feel that most deeply.

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My friend and my guest has been foully murdered within half a mile of my house, within the boundary-wall of my home. Do you think that I can do less than feel myself bound to see him avenged?'

Augusta Harcross smiled—a strange bitter smile.

'You have good reason to feel that,' she said.

There was a short silence. It was so impossible to say anything of a consolatory nature—a death so sudden, so awful—a man stricken down by an unseen hand in the very flower and pride of his life—there seemed no room for comfort. The common phrases, the pious banalities with which friends try to beguile the mourner, would have been worse than idle here. As well might the consoler have approached Calphurnia while her dead Cæsar still lay bundled in his bloody mantle at the base of the statue, as seek to murmur soothing sentences to this lonely woman whom sudden doom had widowed.

'It is very hard to be obliged to speak of this, Mrs. Harcross,' began Sir Francis, hesitating a little, although he had come prepared to speak of this very thing; 'but there is the question of the funeral to be decided, and promptly. Where would you wish your husband to be buried?'

She gave a little cry of anguish, and covered her

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face with her hands; but after a few minutes, replied very calmly,

'In our family vault at Kensal-green; there is no other place. My mother is buried there. I hope to be buried there myself.'

'He has no family grave of his own—with his own people, I mean—where he would have wished to lie?' Sir Francis inquired.

'No.'

'And you would not like him to be buried at Kingsbury, where the Clevedons, except my father, are all buried?'

'O no, no.'

'That will do, dear Mrs. Harcross. I need torment you with no farther questions. Mr. Vallory—your cousin Weston, I mean—has been most indefatigable; and I know you will trust him and me with all minor details.'

He lingered to say a few words in praise of the dead man, touching gently on his social and professional value, and the manner in which his loss would be felt, and then begged most earnestly that Georgie might come to sit with the mourner.

'You know you have always been fond of her,' he said, 'and she is devoted to you, and is really made

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quite miserable by your refusal to see her. I do not say that she would comfort you, but her company would be better than this awful solitude. Or if you would come to her room—that would be better still.'

'You are very good; but I'd rather be alone—I'd rather be with him.' This with a piteous glance towards that darkened chamber where the dead lay.

'But, dear Mrs. Harcross, you would be so much better away from these rooms. There will be people coming by and by—the coroner and others—people who must come. Pray be persuaded.'

'No,' she answered doggedly; 'nothing can make his death seem worse to me than it does now. I would rather stay.'

Sir Francis pleaded still farther, but in vain, and finally left her, full of pity, and painfully impressed with the futility of all endeavour to console.

He went away, and in the corridor met Georgie, whom he had scarcely seen since yesterday's luncheon. He had been up all night in conference with the police and other local authorities, or talking over the details of the night's tragedy with Captain Hardwood and two or three others who had congregated in the smoking-room, averse to the solitude of their own chambers.

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'Poor Harcross! the last kind of fellow you'd have expected to go off in that way,' said the Captain, as if Mr. Harcross had died of apoplexy.

'Have you seen her?' asked Georgie; upon which Sir Francis described his interview with Augusta.

'Poor soul! O Francis, it is so dreadful for her, and it is doubly dreadful to me.' They were standing in the morning-room, where they had gone while Sir Francis was telling his story, the room in which she had waited for her husband vainly yesterday evening, longing for that explanation which had not yet come.

'My darling,' said Sir Francis tenderly, 'I know it is a hard trial for you; but how much harder it must be for her!'

'O Francis, if it had been you!' That was a position which he was hardly able to imagine, so he only shrugged his shoulders with a melancholy air. 'And it might have been you,' his wife went on, 'it might have been you.'

'Well, I really don't see how I could have been the victim, my dear. There must have been *some* motive, you know, however inadequate. Poor Harcross must have done something to provoke the scoundrel's animosity—some man he had unwittingly ruined perhaps by winning a law-suit against

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him. There are fellows capable of brooding upon an imaginary wrong of that kind till they lash themselves into madness.

'What if he were the victim of an error, Francis? What if the murderer mistook him for you?'

'Mistook him for me, Georgie? What are you dreaming about? Why should anybody want to murder me?'

'Have you never done anything to provoke any one's hate, Frank—years ago, when you were more reckless, perhaps, than you are now? Is there no secret of your past life that occurs to you with alarm at such a time as this? have you nothing to fear, nothing to regret? You have said sometimes that you have told me all the history of your life; but was there not one page you kept hidden, one sad dishonourable passage that you could not bear me to know? O my dearest, be truthful to me! Nothing that you have done in the past, no sin of the past or of the present, could lessen my love for you. Tell me the truth, Frank, even now, late as it is!'

'Upon my word of honour, Georgie, I don't in the faintest degree understand the drift of all this. I have told you everything about myself. I have never kept a secret from you, either great or small.'

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'Then you have never provoked the hatred of Richard Redmayne? You were never at Brierwood?'

'Where is Brierwood? I don't even know that.'

'O Frank, your face looks so true, and yet it was the face in the locket that man showed me; the face of his daughter's lover.'

'What locket? what daughter? Really, Georgie, it is rather too bad to bewilder me in this way.'

'Mr. Redmayne accuses you of having run away with his daughter, and he showed me a locket with your miniature.'

'Accuses me of running away with his daughter! And when, pray?'

'Five years ago.'

'And from Brierwood in Kent, I suppose. When you ought to know that I was never in Kent at all till I came home last year, and never had a miniature painted before the one that was done for you. Upon my honour, Georgie, our domestic life is not likely to be very pleasant, if you are going to spring this kind of mine under my feet occasionally.'

For some minutes after this Sir Francis Clevedon was inclined to be angry, and Georgie had to be apologetic, and to assure her husband that she had

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never doubted him, no, not even for a moment; only —only she had been very unhappy, and that dreadful man had seemed so positive, and to have such strong grounds for his accusation, and the miniature was the very image of her darling Frank.

'It may have been poor Harcross's picture,' suggested Sir Francis.

'O no, it was much too handsome, and much too young.'

'But it was painted when he was five years younger, you see, Georgie, and it may have been a flattering likeness then.'

'It may,' said Georgie doubtfully. 'But it was your face, looking at me with dreamy gray eyes. O Frank, think what I must have suffered.'

'Then you must have doubted me, Georgie, and that was a crime,—matrimonial high-treason. But for heaven's sake, tell me all about this man Redmayne, and his accusation. The clue to this murder may be in that.'

'I know that he was dreadfully angry,' answered Georgie, 'and that he seemed desperate, like a man who could do anything.'

Questioned closely by her husband, Georgie described the scene in the library, repeating as faith-

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fully as she could every word that had been spoken by Richard Redmayne.

'This would fairly account for Harcross's objection to come here,' thought Sir Francis.

He kissed his wife, and gave her a free pardon for that offence which he had called matrimonial high-treason.

'But don't do it again, Georgie. You might take up some other delusion, and I might not be able to prove an alibi quite so easily. And now I must go and talk to Vallory about this business, and perhaps to Mr. Rufnell the constable.'

'O Francis, will they hang that poor farmer?'

'Inevitably, I should imagine, if he shot Harcross.'

'But he had been so badly treated—his daughter tempted away from him.'

'Granted, my dear; but the law does not recognise the shooting of seducers.'

'O Francis, I should be so sorry if that poor man were hung. I felt for him so deeply when he told me his story, even though he was accusing you.'

'I am sorry for him too, Georgie. It is a bad business altogether. But I have only one duty in this matter, and that is to see my guest avenged.'

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He went down to his study, a solidly-furnished business-like apartment in an obscure portion of the house, abutting on the offices—a room in which he was wont to receive Mr. Wort, and which had now been made the head-quarters of the committee of investigation—a room to which they could come freely at any moment. Sir Francis found Weston there, in thoughtful solitude, smoking a cigar by the open window, which, as it looked only upon the stable-yard, had not been darkened.

To him Sir Francis repeated the conversation reported by Georgie, particulars which were not new to this gentleman.

'Yes,' said Weston, throwing away the end of his cigar, after he had smoked it out with a meditative aspect, 'yes,' he repeated with exceeding deliberation, 'I don't think there's room for a doubt. Redmayne's the man.'

'But do you suppose there was any truth in his notion about his daughter?'

'Unquestionably. Harcross had spent a summer at Brierwood—just five years ago—and was uncommonly shy upon the subject—never would talk of it, or even tell the name of the place till it was dragged out of him. I felt very sure there was something;

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but I did not know it was anything so serious as this.'

Mr. Rufnell the constable came in while they were talking, with an important air, as of a man whose genius had coped with stupendous difficulties, and emerged victorious from the struggle.

'I think we've got a clue, Rufnell,' said Sir Francis gravely.

'Have you, sir?' said the constable, with a saturnine smile. 'Very likely, sir; but I've got the man.'

'What, you've found out—'

'I've got him, sir; leastways, I've got his gun, which is pretty much the same thing. The man is Joseph Flood, your groom; and we've got as neat a chain of circumstantial evidence agen him as was ever laid before a jury.'

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CHAPTER XIII.

'SOME INNOCENTS 'SCAPE NOT THE THUNDERBOLT.'

RICHARD REDMAYNE went home with that innocent blood upon his head, a miserable man. The burden of his crime had sat lightly enough upon his conscience so long as he believed that he had slain his daughter's false lover. Indeed, in his judgment the act had been no crime, only a just and reasonable revenge.

But to have murdered a man who had never injured him—to have shed innocent blood! That was different, and the burden of *this* fatal unnecessary deed weighed him down to the ground.

He went home to Brierwood, but not to rest. There was a nameless horror in the place—a horror of stillness and narrowness and airlessness. The familiar rooms seemed no wider than a prison cell—in the garden there was neither air nor freedom, only a sultry heat that stifled him. The sound of Mrs. Bush's voice droning some ancient ditty, with a

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quavering turn at the end of each line, jarred upon his nerves to excruciation. He was in that state of mind in which a man can hardly support his own existence—in which his most natural impulse is to blow out his brains. Richard Redmayne had thought of this manner of escape from a present that was intolerable into an unknown future. He had gone upstairs to his room and had handled his pistols; had stood for a few moments irresolute with one of them in his hand, looking down the barrel, and thinking how swift a settlement that might make of all his perplexities. Yet after that brief deliberation he put the revolvers back into their places.

'I must see the end of this business,' he said to himself. 'It would be a cowardly thing to turn my back upon it.'

Had it not been for this thought—had it not been for the apprehension that some innocent man might be charged with his crime—how gladly would he have fled from that narrow world to the wide pastures and broad blue lakes of his beloved Gippsland; to that newer wilder life beyond the fern-tree scrub, among the waters of many rivers winding down from breezy mountain-tops, to that fresh untrodden world, where he could wander with his gun from sunrise to sunset

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shooting wild duck or bandicoot—where he had the freedom and the power of a savage king! For all the days of his life until now he had loved this Kentish homestead with an abiding affection—had preferred it above all other scenes, however glorious in their wilder beauty; but to-day his heart sickened at sight of the narrow fields, the patch of fertile landscape shut in by woods and hills that seemed to be within his arm's length. To-day he was seized with a wild yearning for that other home beyond the southern sea.

'O God, why could I not wait?' he asked himself. 'Why could I not wait to be sure of my man? My wrongs had kept so long, that they might have kept a little longer. Was there any fear that my hatred would grow cold? And to fire like that—at random—in the dark! Yet I could swear that it was his face I saw—it was a trick that the devil played upon me, perhaps. And I might have drunk more than usual yesterday—I daresay I did. My brain was on fire after I had seen him, and I may have drunk a good deal without thinking what I was doing. Yet, my senses were clear enough when I fired that gun, and I can swear that it was his face I saw in the moonlight.'

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He was not a superstitious man—was indeed too unlearned for much superstition. But he had heard country folks talk of witchcraft, and began to think he had been the dupe of some diabolical influence, so very certain was he that the face in the miniature was the face of the man he had slain.

He walked up and down by the broad flower-border where the roses were still blooming—the roses she had loved and cared for—not slim aristocratic standards, but broad spreading bushes or veritable trees straggling upward in unkempt profusion. There were many of them older than himself, bushes from which his young wife had gathered nosegays for the Sabbath-day adornment of the best parlour; old-fashioned cabbage and maiden's blush and white and red moss roses, no *Gloire de Dijon*, or *Malmaison*, or Lady Banks, or later fashionable products of the floriculturist's art.

He paced to and fro in an agony of doubt and expectation. It was long past two, and the inquest at Clevedon was on, if not over. What would be the result? An open verdict, perhaps—by some person or persons unknown! In that case what should he do? Consider his own safety, his own inclination, and start at once for Brisbane? How if he chose

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that selfish course, the natural course for guilt; and how if, when he was gone, circumstances should so shape themselves as to weave a halter for the neck of an innocent man? A luckless wretch might be suspected, tried, and hung before he could hear of it yonder.

'No,' he said to himself resolutely; 'I'm not such a scoundrel as that! I'll stand to my guns. So long as there's no mistake made, I'll hold my tongue. But if an innocent man should be in danger, I'll give myself up.'

He thought of the result of that act. It would be a hard thing to die a shameful death before the eyes of the people who had known him, and respected and liked him, from a boy; to bring the name of Redmayne, the good old name, for whose redemption from the stain of debt and difficulty he had worked so hard out yonder; to bring that time-honoured name under so deep a disgrace, that no future generations of honest Redmaynes could ever wash the foul blot away. To stand confessed before the world as a midnight assassin, a wretch who had not even given his foe a chance of defending himself, a purposeless shedder of blood, whose crime bore a double odium for having been a blunder! He fancied himself hooted

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upon the scaffold, and jerked into eternity amidst the execration of his fellow-men. He fancied what Jim and Mrs. Jim would say when the hideous news came to them, and a vision of that fair home which he was never to see again, and of all the things that he might have done there in years to come, arose before him. Those future unknown years seemed strangely sweet to him now that he had forfeited the right to live them.

He had eaten nothing since yesterday, but he did not get through these dismal hours of suspense without an occasional 'nobbler.' A slow fever devoured him, and his dry lips needed to be moistened now and then, although the spirit which he drank raw to-day did not exercise a cooling influence upon his system. In vain did Mrs. Bush urge him to pick a bit of a savoury roasted spare-rib of pork with sage-and-onions, which she had prepared as an appropriate dinner for a sultry summer's day; 'something light and tasty,' as she remarked, when recommending it to her employer. 'Do-ey try and eat a bit, now, Mr. Redmayne,' she pleaded. 'It don't do nobody any good drinking raw spirits on a hempty stomick. A glass of brandy's not half the harm if yer inside's lined with good victuals. But to go on pouring that burnin' stuff on yer emptiness is regilar sooicide.

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There's no call for you to be upset by this here murder; and when your spirits have had a turn like that, you seem to want something substantial to settle them.'

Mr. Redmayne declined the spare-rib, however, nay, would not even sit down, or make any pretence of eating his dinner. He paced the garden, listened to the striking of the distant church-clock, and waited for tidings of the inquest. Somebody would surely bring the news he longed for, and yet dreaded.

Somebody did. At half-past five Mrs. Bush's goodman came home to his tea, a cool and pastoral meal of bread-and-butter and green-stuff, which he took in the backest of back kitchens, among Mrs. Bush's pails and mops and brooms and black-lead brushes; that industrious matron holding her principal kitchen, with its snow-white hearthstoned flags and shining range, a chamber far too sacred for the defilement of daily meals, and preferring to eat and drink as it were on the outskirts of Brierwood. Very quiet was Mr. Bush's usual return from his afternoon labour, nay, indeed, somewhat furtive and sneaking of aspect was Mr. Bush in a general way, as of a man who had never solved the mystery of his own existence, and felt himself more or less a mistake

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or superfluous atom in the scheme of creation. To-day, however, he approached the back kitchen with a victorious air, full to the brim and overflowing with startling information, and, unduly elated by the sense of his abnormal condition, no longer a man to be curtly told to eat his tea and look sharp about it, as Mrs. Bush wanted to clean herself, and wasn't going to have her back kitchen cluttered up with tea-things all the evening; a man to be deferred to rather, as the possessor of a treasure which it was in his power to impart or withhold.

'Well!' he began, with a pompous air, seating himself at the narrow window table beside the window ledge, where the blacking-brushes lived, and whence came a pungent odour of Day and Martin diluted with vinegar.

'Well, what?' cried Mrs. Bush sharply, as she hewed the big loaf with a broad kitchen knife. 'Lord, how the man do stare! Don't sit with your mouth open like a scarecrow. What's the matter now?'

'O, well,' growled Mr. Bush, 'if you don't want to hear nothink, I don't want to talk. There's no call to take me up short like that, as if you was a-going to snap my nose off.'

'It ain't handsome enough to tempt folks snap-

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ping at it,' the matron replied contemptuously; 'you look as big and puffed out as a Christmas turkey this afternoon. I suppose you've been loitering about Clevedon way instead of doing your work, and have heard somethink more about the murder.'

'I haven't been loitering nowheres; but I may have heard somethink for all that,' returned the outraged Bush, with a wounded air.

'If you've got anything to say, say it,' exclaimed Mrs. Bush, with supreme disgust; 'if there's anything in this mortial world as I hate, it's shilly-shally.'

'Well,' said Mr. Bush solemnly, with his mouth half-full of bread-and-butter, and a Cos lettuce in his right hand poised over the salt-cellar; 'the inquis is over; and as I come along the road home, who should come up along of me but Sam Grinway, and says he, "Well, Bush, have you heard this here about the inquis?" and says I, "No, Samuel; is the inquis over?" and says he, "Yes, and I bin up by the west lodge and heerd all about it. They've brought in a verdick again Joseph Flood, Sir Francis's groom, and they've took him; and it was all along of Bond's daughter as he was jealous of, and she'd been carryin' on shameful with this here Mr. Arkwright, which was a swell from London; and Joseph went proling

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about after dark with his gun—and took and shot him!"'

'A bold-faced hussy!' cried Mrs. Bush indignantly. 'I allus said she was no good, flaunting and flaring with her starched print frocks and neck-ribbons, in spite of her father being as pious a Primitive Methody as you'd find between here and Maidstone. Why, it's her that ought to be hung, if there was any right or reason in the law of the land, and not the young man as did it.'

Mr. Bush chumped his green-stuff meditatively, and responded to this proposition only by a dubious shake of his head. This tracing of criminal acts back to their first causes was an advanced idea which he hardly saw his way to.

'Joseph Flood did it,' he said, 'and Joseph Flood must swing for it. The gal may ha' been flighty, I won't say as she warn't, but gals will be gals; they've as good a right to that saying as b'ys has to be b'ys.'

'Hah!' exclaimed Mrs. Bush, with suppressed contempt, 'if a gal happens to be good-looking, every fool in the parish will stand up for her. Lord a-mercy, Mr. Redmayne, what a turn you did give me, to be sure!'

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This ejaculation was evoked by the apparition of Richard Redmayne looking in at the open lattice. He had come to the window in time to hear the news about Joseph Flood.

'Is Flood in prison?' he asked, with an ashen face which struck terror to the soul of Mrs. Bush.

'Yes, sir; they've put him in Kingsbury lock-up, if Samuel Grinway speaks the truth, and I never knowed Samuel to tell a falsehood.'

Mr. Redmayne waited to hear no more, but walked away from the window, went into the house to refresh himself with a final nobbler, and then set his face towards Kingsbury. No innocent man should lie in durance for his sin.

'Lor, Bush!' cried the matron in a feeble voice, as if ready to sink swooning on the back-kitchen bricks; 'did you ever see any one so gashly pale as master was, when he looked in at that winder? If Joseph Flood had been his own son, he couldn't have looked more took aback!'

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CHAPTER XIV.

'BY THE SAME MADNESS STILL MADE BLIND.'

RICHARD REDMAYNE skirted the fields once more by the familiar track, beholding the free and happy barley with indifferent eyes, all his agricultural instincts in abeyance, with no room for any other thought in his mind than that he was going straight to his death. Not once did the steady course of his thoughts swerve from that direct line; not once did he speculate on remote possibilities of escape from the law's worst penalty. He was going to give himself up to justice; he was going straight to his death.

Strange how his thoughts fled yonder, even in this dire hour, over the width of half the world, to that other land where the skies are brighter and bluer, and the very air has an influence which makes men glad. O fair Gippsland, never more should he wander on her plenty-yielding plains, or climb her mighty mountains; never more should he shoot wild duck on her inland seas, or follow the winding river from

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its upland water-shed, or spend adventurous nights hunting for strayed sheep; or sleep away the summer noontide in the deep shade of a fern-tree gully, while his weary beasts enjoyed their spell close by; or short-hobble his horses under the moon on that liberal half-mile margin of pasture which the squatter's generous rule allows to the traveller's cattle. All that bright free open-air life was lost to him; and it seemed to him now, in this sudden darkness which he deemed the shadow of a swift advancing doom—it seemed to him now that he might have been happy at Bulrush Meads even without Gracey—with a lessened happiness, of course, but still with a heartfelt appreciation of that bounteous land, and all it could yield him.

By one hasty mistaken act he had cut himself off for ever from these things. It would have been sad even, dying peacefully on his bed at Brierwood, to consider that he should see that new world no more. How much harder, then, to face the horror of an ignominious doom; to know himself the destroyer of that good old name which he would have given his life to uphold! And while suffering all this loss, to know that he left his daughter's tempter triumphant, his daughter's early death unavenged. That was the sharpest sting of all.

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He walked slowly, and lingered now and then on his way, sitting down to smoke his pipe, and think over his position. He was scarcely in a situation in which a man would care to hasten his steps. The sun was going down; the ripe corn melted into a sea of gold where the edge of the uplands met the western sky. It was a very beautiful world, on a small scale —a baby-world that had never attained to the vigour and grandeur of manhood, but had kept its infantine graces and childish dimples and smiles.

He looked at the peaceful scene fondly, with mournful loving eyes. How hard he had laboured that he might keep Brierwood and his own good name! And now both were gone — his name rendered for ever execrable, his estate confiscated as the property of a felon.

It was growing dusk as he crossed Kingsbury common. He had waited for that, not wishing to face the light of day when he should leave John Wort's cottage, like Eugene Aram, 'with gyves upon his wrists.'

Very peaceful was the aspect of Kingsbury this calm summer evening. The unwonted bustle and excitement of the morning had worn itself out. There may have been a few more gossips than the nightly

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conclave in the tap-room of the Coach and Horses, but that was all. A murder is an appalling event in the records of a country village; but people cannot stand still to talk about it for ever; there must come a period of exhaustion.

Richard Redmayne went straight to the little office tacked on to Mr. Wort's dwelling, lifted the latch, and went in. He had a notion that the steward would be at work here to-night; but the office was empty—a dismal chamber to look upon in the dusk, with its unpainted matchboard walls, against one of which hung a dilapidated map of the Clevedon property, much scored about with a red pencil, its ink-splashed deal desk, and battered office stools. These shabby surroundings had the true business flavour, to John Wort's mind. He could not have worked in a room with easy-chairs and a Turkey carpet, like Sir Francis Clevedon's study. His business faculties would have been stultified by a morocco and mahogany desk on which he could not splash his ink freely.

Mr. Wort's housekeeper heard the door open and shut, and looked into the office from a door communicating with the kitchen.

'Is your master at home?'

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'No, sir. He's been at Clevedon all day—not been home for a bit of dinner, even. But I expect him at any minute.'

'I'll wait, then,' Richard answered shortly. 'You don't mind my pipe, I suppose?'

This was almost a superfluous question, since the office reeked with stale tobacco.

'O dear, no, sir. Master's a rare one to smoke.'

The housekeeper retired, and Richard took out his blackened cutty-pipe. He smiled grimly as he filled it. How long would he be allowed this constant comforter? Would they let him smoke in prison?

He filled and refilled his pipe, and sat smoking on as the shadows deepened, till the wooden wall opposite to him was veiled in darkness. The woman peeped in and asked if he would like a light, but he answered in the negative. He would rather sit in the dark, he said.

By and by the moon began to climb the heavenly zone, and the first glimmer of her silvery light sent a shudder through Richard Redmayne's frame. That soft fatal radiance brought back the horror of last night.

'The moon's always been mixed up with witch-craft,' he thought; 'and there was something worse

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than witchcraft in last night's business. I'm not such a fool as to take one man for another in a light that I could have read my Bible by, if the devil hadn't blinded me.'

It was past nine o'clock and broad moonlight when John Wort came home. He came in at the office door, his habitual practice, as he had generally letters or memoranda of some kind to deposit in his desk before he could settle down comfortably to his evening meal; sometimes even a letter or two to write for the night post, or for hand delivery to some defaulting tenant. He came in to-night with a very weary air, and recoiled with a start at sight of the the seated figure, half in moonlight, half in shadow.

'What's the matter now?' he asked sharply, not recognising his visitor.

'A good deal,' answered Richard Redmayne.

'Redmayne! Why, what brings you here again to-night? I thought you'd cut me.'

'I'd good reason to do that, John Wort, for it was your lies that brought misery and death upon my poor child.'

'My lies! What do you mean by that?' asked the steward quietly.

He was not going to put himself in a passion with

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Richard Redmayne, a man whom he had liked—whom he pitied with all his heart.

'What do you mean by calling me a liar, Rick? I never told you a falsehood in my life.'

'What? Not when you brought your master to my house, under a false name?'

'My master! Why, man alive, what madness is this?'

'Your master, who had a fancy for coming to our neighbourhood on the sly, and stealing a look at his own estate, like a prince in disguise; or like a sneak and a liar, as he is by nature, and as he proved himself by his acts. 'Twas you who brought him to Brierwood, John Wort; 'twas you who lied about him to my sister-in-law. She would never have opened my doors to a stranger but for your recommendation.'

'My master! My master at Brierwood!'

'Your master, Sir Francis Clevedon.'

'Now, look here, Rick Redmayne,' cried Mr. Wort, folding his arms upon the desk, and facing the farmer steadily in the moonlight, 'make an end of this madness at once and for ever. Sir Francis was never in Kent, to my knowledge, until he came home to take possession of his estate just a year ago.'

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Richard Redmayne laughed aloud—a scornful strident laugh.

'What, you'll face it out, will you? He never came to Brierwood? You never brought him there, and planted him on my foolish money-grubbing sister-in-law as Mr. Walgry? Sir Francis Clevedon and your Mr. Walgry are not one and the same?'

'As there is a God above me, they are not!' answered Mr. Wort firmly. 'Hubert Walgrave lies dead at Clevedon Hall. He changed his name to Harcross when he married an heiress.'

Richard Redmayne started to his feet.

'What!' he cried, 'is that the truth? Is it this man's likeness I've got here in my waistcoat pocket, the miniature that was sent to my girl? Why, it's the image of Sir Francis Clevedon! Do you mean to tell me that two men—strangers—could be so much alike as that; as much like each other as twin brothers?'

'There was a striking likeness between Sir Francis and Mr. Walgrave, though not such a close resemblance as you make out.'

'Get a light and let me show you the miniature,' answered Richard Redmayne.

Howard struck a lucifer, and lighted an oil

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lamp that hung over the desk. Mr. Redmayne put the open locket into his hand without a word.

'Yes,' said John Wort, looking at it gravely. 'This is a portrait of Hubert Walgrave; very much flattered, I grant, and making him pretty near ten years younger than he looked of late years; but not by any means a bad likeness for all that.'

'His portrait!' exclaimed Richard, with suppressed exultation. 'The likeness of the man who lies murdered at Clevedon Hall?'

'Yes,' answered the steward impatiently. 'How many times must I tell you the same thing?'

'Then God is just,' cried Richard Redmayne; 'I killed the right man!'

'*You* killed!' exclaimed Mr. Wort, aghast, staring at the farmer's triumphant face with unutterable horror in his own. '*You* killed him! *You* a murderer! Rick Redmayne, you must be mad!'

'No, John, not mad—not mad now, or mad then; never saner than when I fired that shot. Why, when I came home from Gippsland I meant to kill him.'

'For God's sake, don't tell me that! What, you, Richard Redmayne—a man we've all liked and respected; you that anybody in Kingsbury would have

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trusted, or stood by, through thick and thin—you confess to a dastardly murder?'

'Not a dastardly murder. I tell you I meant to have his life; was there anything less that would have wiped out the score between us two? If I'd asked him to fight me—as gentlemen used to fight each other thirty years ago—do you think he'd have done it, or listened to me? I tell you there was no other way of settling *that* account. I was bound to kill him.'

John Wort looked at him for some minutes in silent wonder, biting his nails doubtfully. No one but a raging madman would have talked like this, surely; and yet this man was perfectly calm and collected, and spoke with an air of conviction that was more strange than the fact of his guilt.

'Good God! Rick Redmayne,' he exclaimed at last, with a groan, 'what have you done?'

'Killed the man who killed my daughter. You call it murder: I call it justice.'

'Why, you don't even know that it was this man poor Gracey went away with!'

'Don't I? What, not when he sent her his likeness? when he was the only man that ever had the opportunity of so much as ten minutes' talk with her? Why, this man lived in my house above a

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month; he was the only gentleman my Gracey knew —d—n him! Come, John Wort, you were a good friend to me in years gone by; speak the truth like a man. Have you any doubt that it was this fellow who tempted my girl away?'

'*No*,' replied the steward emphatically, '*I have not!*'

And then after a pause he went on,

'He's dead, and it can't matter now. You've done your worst. Nothing would have wrung the admission out of me if he were still alive. I did suspect him of taking Grace away, and taxed him with it, as I told you long ago. He denied it—I told you the truth when I said that—but I never believed his denial. There was no one else. She was not a girl to have two lovers, and I had seen those two together one day at Clevedon. But he was such a steady-going fellow, and I thought he might be trusted. I'd known him from a boy, and had never known any harm of him; and there were circumstances in his life, family matters, that made me pity him. Upon my soul, Rick, I don't think I could have been more sorry for what happened if Gracey had been my own daughter. But, O, old friend, for God's sake say there was no meaning in

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your wild talk just now. It was not you who fired that gun last night,—Joseph Flood's gun. How should you have come by it ?'

'The fellow was loafing about the park with it late last night. I thought that he was up to mischief, somehow, and I followed him a bit, and saw him hide his gun in that old summer-house. It was within reach of my arm when I saw *him* coming along the avenue, with the moonlight full upon his face. The devil put it in my way, handy.'

'You must have been mad when you did it.'

'Not any madder than I am now. It may have been a wild kind of justice, but I meant it for justice.'

Mr. Wort groaned once more, and sat down upon the raggedest of the office stools, in blank dismal despair.

'What do you mean by coming here to tell me this, Richard Redmayne ?' he inquired helplessly. 'A pretty pickle you put me in. There's that poor innocent young man in the lock-up hard by; as an honest man, it would be my duty to inform against you.'

'Do your duty,' answered the farmer coolly. 'I came here on purpose to give myself in charge.'

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'You did? And do you know what that means? —Maidstone jail for the next six weeks, to be tried for your life at the next assizes, and to be hung. O, Rick, Rick, to think that any man of your name should come to such an end as that!'

Richard Redmayne shrugged his shoulders, with a gesture that was nonchalant enough, but accompanied by a faint sigh.

'It's hard lines,' he said; 'Heaven knows I've tried to keep that name honest. When I was in debt hereabouts, I felt as if I was scorched through and through with a red-hot branding-iron, because no Redmayne of Brierwood had ever owed money he couldn't pay before my time. I worked hard, and wiped off that stain. But I suppose, when I'm dead and gone, the world will think worse of this business. And yet, John Wort, I'm not sorry that I killed him. I was sorry enough, ready to blow my brains out, when I thought I'd shot the wrong man. But, by the heaven above me, I do not repent of having killed my daughter's destroyer!'

'Good God, Richard, what a hardened conscience you must have!'

'I don't know anything about my conscience, but I know I've been hardening my heart against that man for the last three years, and it wasn't likely I

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should deal over-gently with him when his time came. I hunted for him as well as I could; but I'm not good at that kind of hunting, and when I failed in that, I thought I'd wait. There's a fate in these things. Providence would throw him in my path sooner or later; the world is hardly wide enough to hide a man long from the just wrath of his enemy. So I bided my time quietly enough, but never parted with the hope that I should find him before I died. And when chance did throw him across my path, what would you have had me do?' asked Richard Redmayne, with a sardonic laugh. 'Civilly tell him who I was, I suppose, and ask him to apologise for having broken my heart. No. I have dreamt of our meeting often enough, and all my dreams were coloured with blood. Why, I have felt my grip upon his lying throat many a time, and have seen his false face change and darken as my grasp tightened.'

'You have nursed your hatred until it has grown into a monomania, Richard. You could hardly have been answerable for what you did last night.'

'I was answerable: and I am ready to answer to God and man.'

'"Vengeance is mine,"' murmured the steward. 'Don't seek to justify your sin in the eyes of God, Richard, but try to obtain His pardon. I don't want

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to preach a sermon to you; it's hard enough to be placed in such a situation as yours, and I don't believe there ever was a man more to be pitied. I only say this—don't take pride in a stubborn heart, Richard. It's wiser to own yourself a sinner.'

'I'll think of squaring that account by and by,' answered the other in his reckless way; '*that* can stand over. I want to set matters right about that young man they've sent to prison. I want to take my burden on my own shoulders.'

Mr. Wort leant his elbows on his desk, buried his face in his hands, and cogitated profoundly; while Richard Redmayne coolly refilled his pipe, and lighted it at the office lamp.

What was he to do? Give this man into the custody of the patrol from Tunbridge who nightly perambulated the peaceful shades of Kingsbury—pass him on to the jail where Joseph Flood now lay in durance? Do this with the certainty—or something very close to certainty—that he was handing his old friend over to a shameful doom? John Wort felt as if he could not do this thing.

Was there no way of escape? No way by which Richard Redmayne could get clear off, and yet release young Flood from his present peril? Might he not

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draw up a full confession of his guilt, get his signature attested by some one who should not know the real nature of the document, and then start for Australia, leaving his confession behind him? That would surely exculpate Joseph Flood, and yet leave the guilty man a chance of life and liberty. Mr. Wort was a man who respected the law and all its mysteries, but it did not appear to him that the world in general would be any better for the hanging of Richard Redmayne. He had also a just appreciation of the penalties to which an accessory after the fact would be liable; but he fancied he might suggest his friend's escape without incurring these. There was no money involved in the transaction, nor need the world ever know that he was cognisant of Richard Redmayne's crime.

'Look here, Rick,' he said at last. 'There's no one can think worse of what you've done than I do; but I know more of what's gone before than the rest of the world, and I won't be the man to hand you over to the hangman.'

And then Mr. Wort went on to suggest, very clearly and concisely, that line of conduct which it seemed to him Richard might safely adopt.

'If they hunt you down at last,' he said in conclusion,—'and they'll hardly do that, for you can get

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a good start of them—why, you'll have had a run for your life anyhow.'

'No,' said the farmer quietly, 'I've done the deed, and I'll stand by it. It doesn't seem half so bad to me to stand in the dock now that I know I killed the right man. I'll face the world, John Wort, and let the world know how a man can punish the destroyer of his child. By heavens, if there were more such rough-and-ready justice in the world, there would be less villany. The law's a big machine that only moves in a certain groove. Let a man steer clear of that, and he may be as big a scoundrel as he pleases.'

'What do you mean to do, then?'

'Give myself over to the police as soon as I leave this office. I thought you would have been in a hurry to do it for me; but as you're not, I suppose I must do it myself.'

There was farther parley after this, but Mr. Wort's arguments were of no avail. Richard Redmayne went out into the summer night, and walked along the Tunbridge road till he met the patrol, to whom he told his story.

The man was at first incredulous. He knew Mr. Redmayne by sight, and had heard people talk of the

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strange secluded life he led at Brierwood. The poor fellow was a little off his head, no doubt, thought the policeman; but finding the poor fellow very resolute, he suggested that they should proceed forthwith to Clevedon—Sir Francis was a justice of the peace—and that Mr. Redmayne should there repeat his extraordinary statement.

It was late when they arrived at Clevedon; but Sir Francis was still in his study, with a London detective for his companion. This man had only arrived an hour before, his services not having been available at the moment the telegram arrived; and to this man Sir Francis had been relating all that Georgie had told him about Richard Redmayne.

'A curious story,' remarked Mr. Winch, the detective, coolly; 'and it certainly does seem at the first glimpse to have a bearing on the case. Yet it hardly comes to much when taken against the evidence of the gun, which Flood owns to; and of that girl he's been keeping company with, who, from what I can hear of the inquest, seems to have done him no end of harm with her hysterics, and her talk about his jealousy, and being afraid of him, and so on. It does not appear, from anything you tell me, that this Redmayne threatened violence towards you while un-

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der that delusion about the miniature; and unless he had threatened, the rest comes to nothing.'

'A man may mean a good deal without threatening,' said Sir Francis; 'and you see in this case there has been a wrong done, and there was a strong motive. Lady Clevedon said the man had a desperate air, like a man who was capable of any rash act.'

'But how did he come by your groom's gun? How do you get over the gun, sir?'

'I leave that problem for you to solve. All I can say is, that I know this Flood to be a good fellow; he's been with me only a twelvemonth, certainly, but I know something of his disposition, and he came to me with an excellent character from a gentleman near here. No, I cannot believe Joseph Flood to be an assassin.'

The Baronet and Mr. Winch were still discussing the details of the case, when a servant announced that a policeman, accompanied by another person, wished to see Sir Francis.

'Bring them in immediately,' said Sir Francis. 'Some new evidence, I suppose,' he added to the detective.

'Yes, sir,' replied Mr. Winch, with a sarcastic air; 'no doubt you'll have plenty of mare's nests brought you by the local police.'

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The job was a good one, and the accomplished Winch did not wish the local police to cut the ground from under his feet by any abnormal sharpness and activity.

Richard Redmayne walked first into the room, alone, unshackled, with his head more erect than he had carried it for a long time; a noble specimen of the English yeoman class, with something of the free grace of some wild forest creature in his bearing, which was even more noble than the sturdy British ruggedness. He was a handsome man still, in spite of the change and ruin that had come upon him; and as he stood calmly facing Sir Francis in the lamplight, with only the table between them, the Baronet thought that he had never beheld a more striking figure.

He guessed at once that this man must be Richard Redmayne.

The policeman told his story briefly, but with a good many 'he says,' and 'I says,' to carry him through it.

'And as you was the nearest magistrate, Sir Francis, and concerned in this business, as one may say, begging your pardon, Sir Francis, I thought as how I'd better bring him along here; and if you see any grounds for believing this 'ere rum start, why, you could make out a warrant and commit him. I could

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get a cart and drive him over to Tunbridge for to-night, and he can go on to Maidstone to-morrow; leastways, if you think there's any truth in his story.'

'I have reason to know that his story is perfectly true,' said Sir Francis, filling in the warrant as he spoke. 'Abominable as his crime is, I am glad that he has at least had enough good feeling left to prompt him to give himself up, rather than let an innocent man suffer for his wickedness.'

'Yes, Sir Francis,' replied the policeman, looking at Richard Redmayne with a lenient countenance; 'and I hope as how that, and the fack of him and his having farmed their own land for the last three hundred year, will stand in his faviour with the judge and jury.'

The guilty man himself spoke not a word, but stood quietly waiting to be handed on upon the next stage of that brief journey which was to convey him to the gallows.

'I should be glad if you would repeat the statement which you made just now to the officer, Mr. Redmayne, here, in the presence of witnesses.'

The man obeyed, unhesitatingly, telling his story in the plainest words, with no attempt to extenuate his conduct.

'A bad business from beginning to end,' said Sir

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Francis, with a sigh. 'You can remove your prisoner, officer. My people will accommodate you with a conveyance, and you can take a groom to Tunbridge with you, if you want one.'

'Better let me go, Sir Francis,' interposed Mr. Winch. 'I'm better up to this kind of business than a groom; I rose from the ranks myself, sergeant.'

Not a word more was said. The information was made out, and the warrant granted. Richard Redmayne waited with Mr. Winch in a lobby adjoining the housekeepeer's room, while a dog-cart was being got ready for his speedy transport to Tunbridge. They drove at a smart pace through the moonlit country, every inch whereof was so familiar to the prisoner. He sat beside the driver with folded arms, silently watching the landscape as it sped past him; as if, looking on hill and valley, coppice and hedgerow, for the last time, he would fain have printed every feature of the scene upon his memory, as a picture which he might keep in his mind to brighten the gloom of his narrow cell.

Fear he had none, nor remorse, as yet; but he had a vague feeling that it was sad to turn his back upon so fair a world; to lose the glory of summer sunshine and the freshness of summer winds for ever.

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CHAPTER XV.

'HOME THEY BROUGHT HER WARRIOR DEAD.'

THEY carried all that remained of Hubert Harcross back to Mastodon-crescent—secretly, under cover of night, as befitted so solemn a transit. They set up the ponderous treble coffin on trestles, in that darksome den behind the dining-room, which was filled for the most part with law-books and parliamentary reports; the dismal chamber where the dead man had been wont to spend solitary hours in the stillest watch of the night.

They brought him home stealthily, when Mastodon-crescent was wrapped in sleep—that sleep of care-takers and lonely housemaids which falls upon western London out of the season. They brought him home and laid him in this darkened study, there to wait the final journey to the Vallory vault at Kensal-green, a grim square stone edifice, nearly as large as a modern villa, with an iron door of an Egyptian design that was eminently suggestive of mummies.

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Mrs. Harcross came home the day after this midnight journey. Georgie and Sir Francis had done their uttermost to persuade her to remain at Clevedon, but in vain.

'You are very kind to wish it, but I would rather be with *him*,' she said piteously; as if there were indeed as much companionship between herself and that clay-cold corpse as there had been when those two were living man and wife.

Georgie would have gone to London to stay with her, but this offer too Mrs. Harcross declined.

'Indeed, I would rather be alone; nothing can make my loss any less or make me think of it any less.'

Her father had arrived at Clevedon by this time, having sped thither as swiftly as his gout would suffer him to speed; and under her father's escort, Mrs. Harcross left Clevedon Hall to return to that splendid mansion which had been the cheerless home of her brief wedded life.

It was a dreary journey and a dreary business altogether for Mr. Vallory, and although he was sincerely attached to his daughter, he would gladly have deputed the task to Weston, who was languishing to be useful, and deeply wounded by his cousin's refusal

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to see him; a lengthy journey, although they travelled express, and shot the stations swift as a falling star. Augusta sat silent, with slow tears rolling down her pale cheeks every now and then. Once or twice Mr. Vallory made some feeble attempt to comfort; but the dead man's untimely end not coming in any way under the category of happy releases, he was sorely put to it to shape even the tritest consolatory sentence.

Across the dull agony of Augusta's grief there shot the sting of a sharper anguish—the biting pain of remorse. True that she had loved the dead man as deeply after her own nature as wife ever loved husband, but she had not the less cheated him of his due, locked her love in her own breast, starved him with cold words and disdainful looks, kept him at arm's-length as it were, lest in coming too near he should discover that she was a very woman at best.

She had cheated him; that was the cruel truth which came home to her now. She had been proud of him, but had never acknowledged her pride; had paid him none of that tender tribute of praise and even sweet-savoured flattery which loving women give to their husbands, the humble flowers of speech which strew the path matrimonial, as village children scatter their blossoms before the feet of bridegroom

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and bride. Every man is more or less godlike in his own estimation, and the world must seem cold to that unappreciated hero for whom no altar fire burns at home. Hubert Harcross had been made to do without such domestic homage. If he came home to Mastodon-crescent glowing with a professional victory, and in a moment of expansion communicated the particulars of his success, no rapture beamed in the eyes of his wife, no sympathetic word encouraged him to dilate upon his triumph; he was only told that that odious court had made him late for dinner, or that he had only half an hour to dress if he meant to keep his engagement in Portman-square.

She remembered these trifles, and many other details of her married life, to-day as she travelled swiftly towards that worse than empty house where her dead husband was lying. She remembered that interview in the picture-gallery at Clevedon Hall, when he had told her the secret of his life; remembered with a bitter pang how she had refrained from any expression of pity for him, and thought only of herself, and compassionated only herself, as if the great wrong done to him had been only a wrong against her. It was a bitter thing to reckon these small injustices, these petty slights, now, when the victim of them

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had passed beyond the reach of apology or atonement. Down to the grave must she carry this burden of a great debt; farther than the grave she could not look. She was a religious woman, in a church-going, strictly conforming sense, but she was not spiritual enough to be able to say, 'We shall meet in a fair far-off land, where he will read my heart and forgive me!'

Very stately was the funeral which for one brief hour enlivened the emptiness of Mastodon-crescent. All that can be done by sable plumes and costly trappings, by solemn-visaged mutes and inky-hued Flemish horses, by mourning-coaches and close-shuttered broughams, was done to do honour to the dead. Augusta Harcross could not be dissuaded from accompanying her husband in that last journey. She went with her father in the first of the mourning-coaches, silent, ashy pale, but tearless. She stood beside the vault of the Vallorys, and saw the massive oaken coffin deposited in its stony niche, and looked at the empty place beside it, where she might lie when her time should come.

And so ended the story of her married life. She went home desolate to that abode of horrors, a spacious and splendid mansion where 'love, domestic

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love no longer nestles;' went home to find the blinds drawn up, open windows admitting the summer air, the rooms and balconies bright with flowers; a smirking pretence that there had been no such thing as a death in the family palpable everywhere.

A strange fancy seized her when she had sent her father home to Acropolis-square to nurse his gout, and had thus got rid of his clumsy attempts at consolation—a fancy for looking at the dead man's rooms on the third floor, the very thought whereof in this day of remorse had been one of her small tortures. Those third-floor rooms were one of the many trivial slights she had put upon him, one of the little ways by which she had suffered him and the household to know that he was only a secondary personage in that establishment.

She went up the servants' staircase, a roomy staircase enough, for everything in this stately district was built on wide lines, but of a somewhat chilling aspect, the stairs covered with floor-cloth, the walls painted a dingy drab. She went up to the spacious chamber which she had so rarely entered during her husband's lifetime. It was not a cheerful room: the windows on this story had been designed with a view to external effect; the sills were breast

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high, the lower panes of plate glass obscured by the stone cornice outside them. There was plenty of light, but the windows revealed nothing of the outer world, only three patches of summer sky, no glimpse of verdant park or cheerful squares. The room was large and bare. Mr. Harcross had repudiated all finery. A huge metal bath occupied one end, with all its works and pipes exposed like a skeleton clock. There was a barren desert of floor-cloth, a low wide mahogany wardrobe, full of long narrow drawers (for the presiding genius of the tailoring art has discovered that to hang a coat is destruction); one cushionless oak arm-chair stood before the dressing-table, a chair of the severest school of upholstery, such a chair as Canute the Dane may have sat in when he put his flatterers to the blush on the edge of Southampton Water; two grim rows of boots on a stand masked the fireplace, half a dozen railway time-tables and a legal almanac adorned the space above the mantelpiece; picture, or bronze, or bust, or object of luxury there was none.

Augusta seated herself in the arm-chair, and looked round the room drearily. For how many conventional dinner-parties, for how many joyless receptions, Hubert Harcross had dressed himself in this

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room! How often and how often had he mounted that cheerless stair and put on the regulation costume, when it would have suited his humour so much better to dine at home and to dawdle away a lazy evening after his own pleasure, sleeping a little, reading a little, enjoying the rare privilege of rest! How often had he gone up to that room to dress, feeling like a slave at a wheel, grinding on for ever!

It was not possible that Augusta could fully comprehend how joyless this life of fashionable pleasure had been to him; but she did know that she had often insisted on his going out when he would rather have remained at home, that she had squared his days and hours by the rule and compass of her particular world, that she had never let him live his own life.

Very bitter is the memory of such small injuries when the victim of them lies dead.

Her eyes wandered slowly about the room that was so strange to her. The sparsely-furnished chamber had no strong individuality of its own; it was not a room which even hinted at the history of its last occupant; there were no scattered evidences of his favourite pursuits, no traces of his presence. It was a room entirely without litter, and it is litter which

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most bespeaks the character of the tenant. You may read the history of a household on a dustheap sometimes better than in the bric-à-brac of a carefully arranged drawing-room.

'The room is like himself,' Augusta thought; 'it tells nothing of his life.'

On one side of the fire-place there were three or four trunks and portmanteaus, one iron-clamped box, much larger than the rest, a shabby much-battered receptacle, decorated with the disfigured labels of various railway companies, the very box in which Hubert Walgrave had carried his books to Brierwood. On this massive chest Augusta's eyes lingered thoughtfully.

'I daresay he kept his papers in that,' she said to herself—'old letters, secrets perhaps; a man who told so little must have had secrets.'

She took a bunch of keys from her pocket, and looked at them with a faint and bitter smile; the dead man's keys, on a ring with his name and address engraved upon it, each key distinguished by a neat ivory label.

'If he had any secrets, they are all in my power now,' she thought. 'Or was that one secret of his birth the only thing he ever kept from me? What-

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ever papers he has left, I had better examine and burn them. I don't want all the world to know my husband's history.'

She moved a couple of empty portmanteaus which surmounted the iron-clamped box, and then knelt down before it and opened it.

There were no papers in that capacious chest. Only a tangle of unmade silk dresses and cashmere shawls, French slippers, ivory-backed hair-brushes, daintily carved by the cunning hand of some Chinese artisan, fans, scent-bottles, packets of primrose and lavender gloves—the things Mr. Walgrave had bought years ago for Grace Redmayne.

Mrs. Harcross dragged these objects out of the chest one by one, at arm's length, as if the very touch of them might have defiled her, and flung them in a heap on the floor. What did they mean? None of them had been used. They were tumbled and injured from rough packing, but all unworn. No scrap of paper, no vestige of letter or memorandum, helped to solve the mystery. There was nothing but this confusion of woman's clothing, a multitude of delicate and costly objects crammed pell-mell into a big box.

Having cast them forth in this way, Mrs. Harcross was presently obliged to put them back again.

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It would never do for the prying eyes of Tullion or of any domestic in that house to rest upon those inscrutable silks and slippers and cashmeres and hairbrushes. She thrust them back into the chest, leaving them if possible in a worse condition than the state in which she had found them, put down the lid hastily, and locked and double-locked the receptacle. Then with a little wailing cry she clasped her hands across her brow, and sat, fixed as Niobe, upon the ground beside that box.

'They must have belonged to some one he loved,' she said to herself. 'What other reason could he have had for keeping them?'

Her quick eye had told her that the things were of modern fashion, made within the last few years; things that could not by any possibility have belonged to his mother, who had died more than thirty years ago. She could not comfort herself with that idea, as she might have done otherwise.

'That pale apple-green was in fashion the summer before my marriage,' she said to herself, thinking of one of the delicate fabrics which she had stuffed relentlessly into the box. 'Bouffante made me a dress of that very shade for a garden-party.'

This was the bitterest pang of all. She could

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have forgiven the dead man for loving her with a measured affection, but not for bestowing unmeasured love elsewhere.

'He must have loved the owner of those things very dearly,' she thought, 'or he would hardly have run such a risk as to keep them.'

Those cashmeres and packets of gloves and plumed and painted fans, such a heap of unworn finery discarded, had a look of luxury and recklessness. She thought of all the stories she had heard from worldly-wise matrons of bijou villas in the shades of Fulham or St. John's Wood, and it seemed to her that these things must have been part of the belongings of such a villa. The thought led her into a labyrinth of painful speculations. The last idea that could have entered her imagination was that only for a village maiden, tender and pure and true, had these fineries been chosen.

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CHAPTER XVI.

'WHY BANISH TRUTH? IT INJURES NOT THE DEAD.'

RICHARD REDMAYNE was a prisoner in Maidstone jail. Very wearisome were the examinations and cross-examinations which were necessary before the indictment against the actual sinner was fairly made out, and the innocence of Joseph Flood so demonstrated as to admit of his release from custody. Then, with the season of hop-gathering, and the long October nights lit here and there by camp-fires, came the assizes. Rick Redmayne, of Brierwood Farm, the kindly master, the cheerful open-hearted yeoman and trusty friend of years gone by, stood in the dock to plead guilty to a midnight assassination.

Never was there a profounder silence than that which held the court spell-bound when, after a verdict of guilty and a recommendation to mercy, the prisoner was asked if he had anything to say.

'Yes,' answered Richard Redmayne quietly.

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'There is something I should be thankful to say, with your lordship's leave. I should like the world to know why I shot that man.'

And then in very plain and simple words, with a singular clearness and conciseness, he told Grace's story and his own. His return from Australia, his search, his discovery—only of a grave—his rooted conviction that the revealment of her lover's villany had slain his daughter. He told the judge, in a few rugged powerful sentences, what he felt as he sat in the moonlight watching his enemy's approach, and why he fired straight at that ememy's breast.

'I don't want anybody to say that I was off my head that night,' he said in conclusion. '*I meant to do it.* I'd rather speak the truth and hang for it than be saved by a lie.'

All the plausible rhetoric of a Thurtell or a Fauntleroy, airing a university education in the dock, would have seemed poor beside that unvarnished statement of facts. Already the jury had recommended the guilty man to mercy; the judge strengthened their recommendation by all the might of his own influence. Thank God, we do not live in hanging days! Of ten men doomed to the gallows six

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escape their doom, and Richard Redmayne was one of the six. Three days before the date appointed for his execution the jail chaplain informed him that the secretary of state had been pleased to commute his sentence to penal servitude for life.

Richard Redmayne gave a deep sigh of relief when he heard these tidings, but was not wildly elated, like a man for whom the prospect of death had been full of terror.

'I thank you kindly, sir,' he said very quietly. 'I feel much beholden to you and the other gentlemen for having taken all this trouble to beg me off; and I'm very glad for the sake of the good old name that I'm not going to be jerked out of this world by the common hangman. But as far as my own feelings go, I think I'd as lief have ended my troubles even that way. Hard labour and a prison for the rest of one's life isn't a lively prospect for a man to look forward to.'

'But it is a mercy for which you have good reason to be grateful, Redmayne,' the chaplain answered gravely, 'since it will afford you time for penitence. A crime such as yours is not to be wiped out hastily, though we cannot reckon the mercy of God to sinners, or what special dispensation He may reserve for

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those who lie under the final sentence of the law. You have a great work to do for your soul in the years to come, Richard; for I fear your mind is not yet awakened to the enormity of your offence. Think how great a sin it was to lurk waiting for your enemy in the darkness of the night.'

'It was broad moonlight,' said Richard bluntly; 'he might have seen me as well as I saw him.'

'The act was not the less treacherous,' rejoined the chaplain. 'Consider how great a sin it is to send a soul unprepared to stand before its Maker. And by your own showing this man had been a sinner; even his sin against your daughter may have been still unrepented of.'

Richard Redmayne stood for a few moments looking at the ground in thoughtful silence, before he replied to this suggestion.

'I don't know,' he said at last, 'but I think somehow that he was sorry;' and then he told the story of his last visit to the churchyard at Hetheridge, and of the garland of snow-white hothouse flowers. 'I hardly think he'd have remembered her birthday, and gone yonder to lay that wreath upon her grave, if he hadn't been sorry. It would have been easier for him to forget her. If I'd remembered

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those flowers upon her grave that night at Clevedon, I don't think I should have shot him.'

It was the first expression of any feeling like sorrow or regret which had dropped from Rick Redmayne's lips. The chaplain, although recognising something noble in the man, had begun to fear he was a hardened sinner; but at this first indication that the stubborn heart could melt, the good man took courage, and grew more hopeful about his spiritual patient. He worked this vein with all his might before the prisoner was transferred to Portland: talked much of the dead girl, and of God's providence, which had snatched her from a world that was full of snares for helpless innocent wanderers, who had once strayed from the home-nest. He talked of that mysterious spirit-world, in which the secrets of all hearts are to be made manifest; a world where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, neither tears nor death, neither sin nor sorrow; where Richard Redmayne and his daughter, and his daughter's lover, might meet, forgiven and forgiving.

His labours were not in vain. It was with a softened spirit that the farmer left Maidstone jail and the country of his birth, with no last look at the stubble fields and busy hop-gardens of Brierwood,

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close guarded with other felons in a railway van, roughly shipped as if they had been a small herd of cattle sent up to the London market.

But before the removal of this little band of delinquents to new quarters, Rick Redmayne had an interview with an old friend. John Wort, the steward, paid him a visit in his cell at Maidstone, on the last day of his residence there, and bade him a kindly farewell, not without some show of emotion, as sternly held in check as any rough-and-ready gruff-spoken man of business ever held his more tender emotions.

'Thank God they remitted the sentence, Rick,' said the steward. 'I daresay it seems hard enough to you to go to Portland. But, bless my soul, I hear the air is uncommonly healthy, and the diet good; and who knows how soon you may get a ticket-of-leave—if—if you behave well, as of course you will, and attend chapel regular—though I suppose that'll be compulsory—and read your Bible, and what not, and make friends with the chaplain?'

'I'm a lifer,' said Richard grimly; 'I don't suppose tickets-of-leave are dealt out very free to lifers.'

'O, but there's no knowing. There are exceptional cases, you know. And favouritism goes a good

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way. You'll start with a good character, and be sure you make friends with the chaplain.'

'I'll curry favour with no man,' said Rick proudly.

'Curry favour! of course not; but you like your Bible, don't you? and you may just as well read it.'

'I should like to see Queensland and the new farm again before I die, and to see what Jim has made of it,' said Rick thoughtfully; 'else I don't think it much matters whether I'm in jail or out of it. I suppose my work at Portland island will be out of doors, and that I shall have the open sky above my head, and feel the sea wind blowing over me. I don't care how hard the work may be, so long as it isn't inside four walls.'

'But if ever you do get free, Rick, a few years ahead of us—'

'If ever I do, I'll sail straight away for Brisbane. I sha'n't come back to Kent, to be pointed at as the first that ever brought disgrace on the name of Redmayne.'

'O, Rick, I don't believe there's a man among us who doesn't pity you,' said the steward earnestly. 'Sir Francis was one of those that tried hardest to get the sentence commuted. Lady Clevedon—well,

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there—the tears were in her eyes when she talked to me about you.'

'Tender-hearted soul,' murmured Richard gently. 'I was sorry for her when I thought I'd killed her husband; but I can't for the life of me get to feel friendly towards him, though I know he's never done me any harm, and has even stood my friend since my trial. He's too much like that other. God, God! I couldn't have believed such a likeness was possible between men who were nothing to each other!'

'The likeness was strong, certainly, but hardly so close as you think. You only saw Harcross in the moonlight; if you'd seen both men by broad day, you'd have seen plenty of difference between them. The strangest thing was the accidental likeness in that miniature, an accident that might have cost Sir Francis his life. But they were like each other, there's no denying that, only the resemblance may not be quite so strange as you think.'

'What do you mean by that?'

'Come, Rick, I believe you're to be trusted—not a man to blab everything you know, or to talk where talking would be a breach of honour—so I'll tell you a secret. Those two were something more than casual acquaintance, though Sir Francis doesn't know

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it, and is never likely to know it. They were half-brothers!'

'What?'

'Half-brothers. Ten years before Sir Lucas Clevedon married Miss Agnes Wilder, he ran away with an actress, a pretty woman, and a woman who was, for a few seasons, the rage up in London. She went by the name of Mrs. Mostyn, but whether she had a husband, living or dead, is more than I know; and whether Sir Lucas ever married her is more than I know. But my belief is that he did; for just before she died he sold an estate that his mother had left him, and settled every sixpence of the purchase money in trust for the benefit of the son that had been born somewhere in Italy. Lord Dartmoor was one of the trustees, and I was the other, and it was Lord Dartmoor made him do it, as I heard drop from him in the course of the business. It was a good lump of money that he parted with this way, and I knew Sir Lucas well enough to know that he wouldn't have sacrificed as much as a twentieth part of the sum for any generous or manly consideration—in plain words, not unless he was obliged. So I have always suspected there was some kind of marriage—if not strictly legal, still strong enough to

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frighten Sir Lucas—and that the poor lady was persuaded to sell her son's birthright for this settlement. Sir Lucas had just come home from the Continent, and was paying his court to another lady at the time, the only daughter and heiress of a great banker, a young lady who afterwards married a nobleman. That courtship never came to anything. Sir Lucas was going down hill by this time, and his character had got to be pretty well known; so the young lady's father shut the door in his face, and he came down to Clevedon, and shut himself up and sulked like a wounded wild beast. As to his son, I don't believe he ever took the trouble to see him after he left him somewhere in foreign parts, with the poor mother. If anything was wanted to be done, I did it; and when Lord Dartmoor died, I had the whole management of the boy's business till he came of age, when my trusteeship expired. We gave him a first-rate education—there was just enough income to do that liberally, and leave a small margin for accumulation. He was a clever, steady-going lad, and seemed to do well wherever he went. As a young man he was free from all his father's vices. I had as much trust and confidence in him as I might have had in my own son, or I should never have

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brought him across your threshold. You'll believe that of me, won't you, Richard Redmayne? I should never have brought him to Brierwood, if I hadn't thought him an honest man.'

'Ay, ay,' said Rick gloomily, 'you trusted him, I daresay; but the wrong was done for all that. A stranger was brought into my house while I was away, a stranger who broke my daughter's heart.'

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CHAPTER XVII.

'AND WHEN HE FALLS, HE FALLS LIKE LUCIFER.'

Mrs. Harcross read Richard Redmayne's story in the *Times*—read it with dry eyes, but a bitter and passionate heart. So she had been the dupe, after all; and all that remorse for her own shortcomings, all that sad yearning for the days of her married life to come back again, that she might be a better wife to the husband of her love—all these pangs of conscience were wasted agony. He had never loved her; his false heart had been given to this country girl; his moody hours of thought and silence had been a tribute to that dead love. He had given to her, his legitimate wife, only the unreal image and semblance of affection, while tender memories and remorseful thoughts were lavished on that lost idol.

In the light of this discovery she remembered a hundred petty details of the life that was ended; the

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merest trifles in themselves, but indicating so much now that she possessed the key to their meaning. She remembered how much more prone he had been to fits of absence and gloom after that summer holiday in Kent than he had ever been before—a change which she had ascribed to altered health, and about which, in the proud security that a well-developed organ of self-esteem gives its possessor, she had troubled herself very little. She drained her cup of bitterness to the dregs, and even went down to Brierwood to see the place where her lover had learned to be false to her. Mrs. Bush was still in charge of the homestead, and quite ready to tell the strange lady all she knew, even without the bribe of a sovereign which Mrs. Harcross gave her. Augusta saw the low old-fashioned rooms; the garden, where a few pale monthly roses were still blooming with a faint perfume that seemed like a memory of vanished sweets. Mrs. Bush pointed out the cedar 'under which Mr. Redmayne and his fambly was so fond of sittin'—Miss Grace, and her aunt and uncle, and all—of a Sunday evenin'.' How common it all sounded! And it was for a girl with such surroundings as these that he had been shamefully false to her! For this poor cottage heroine he had forfeited his life!

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There was a photograph of Grace still hanging over the chimney-piece in Richard's room—a poor faint shadow of the sweet changeful face. What, was it for this insignificant countenance he had betrayed her? She questioned Mrs. Bush closely about the dead girl. Was she prettier than that picture—much prettier? Mrs. Bush replied that she was 'pleasing,' and could not be induced to venture beyond that cautious epithet. Augusta asked permission to walk round the garden once more, by herself; and having obtained it, went slowly along the path where Hubert and Grace had lingered quoting *Romeo and Juliet* in the summer night; looked drearily into the orchard where they had sat on sultry afternoons, she with some never-to-be-finished needlework in her lap, he reading and expounding Shelley's *Epipsychidion*, and thinking how sweet it would be to spend the rest of his days in a garden or an orchard at Grace Redmayne's feet. Augusta gazed upon this humble scene with tired aching eyes, marvelling strangely, in the midst of her despair, how he, to whom all the glories of the Acropolis-square district were open, could have endured existence in such a scene as this, even for a week. And then she went back to the fly that had brought her from the station,

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and made her dismal journey home, there to seclude herself from all companionship, and brood upon this new trouble.

It was a cruel blow, a most humiliating revelation; for she had loved the traitor, still loved him, holding his memory dearer than any earthly affection. Still more bitter even than the first shock of the discovery was Weston Vallory's visit of condolence, with the *Times* newspaper in his pocket, and a smug smile of satisfaction lurking at the corners of his cunning mouth.

'It is the fate of noble natures to be deceived, my dear Augusta,' he said with a sympathetic air. 'Suffering such as you are called upon to endure is a heritage of sorrow which but too often accompanies nobility of heart.'

Mrs. Harcross was the last of women to brook any sentimental impertinence of this kind. All the cousinship in the world could not, in her eyes, justify such violation of her sacred grief.

'Who taught you to gauge my sorrow?' she cried, with passionate disdain; 'or to measure *his* sins with your petty plumb-line? At his worst he was better and nobler than you ever were or can be. Stick to your office desk, and your copying machine,

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and your gutta-percha speaking-tubes, Weston, if you please, and do not presume to talk of my troubles.'

This was rather a knock-down blow for Weston Vallory, who had fancied the course very smooth and straight before him now that Providence in its wisdom had removed that stumbling-block, Hubert Harcross.

He left his cousin's presence crestfallen, but not despairing. Augusta's words and manner had been contemptuous to an unbearable degree; but then a woman in a passion will say anything; and he had perhaps been somewhat premature in his offers of sympathy. The aspect of things would be different by and by, no doubt. He would resent this outrage by a lofty silence, and a dignified withdrawal of his presence; he would hold himself aloof from Augusta for some time to come, until that foolish infatuated woman should discover that the man who had always been useful had perforce of habit become necessary.

He went back to his office desk, as his cousin had bidden him, and worked on steadily, adding brick to brick in that vast edifice the firm of Harcross and Vallory, and looking forward with a hopeful patience to that future day in which Augusta and her fortune

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should be his, and when the butler and his satellites, and all the household in Mastodon-crescent, should bow down before him, and own him for their master. With such a house and such a wife, supported and sustained by the business in Old Jewry, which must eventually become all his own, what more of earth's splendours or fame's laurels could he desire? He would not have exchanged such a lot for the might of Crœsus, or Darius, or Alexander, or Hannibal, or Polycrates, or any of those classical 'parties,' whose works had made the burden of his school-days, who abode in hourly dread of unpleasant oracles, and altogether appeared to be more subject to the fluctuation of fortune, and the malice of the gods, than any modern adventurer.

So Mr. Vallory junior held his soul in patience, and his faith was strong in time; whereby it was something of a shock to him to learn one fine morning from his uncle that Augusta was going to sell off the splendid goods and chattels in Mastodon-crescent, and to travel on the Continent for a year or so with her father.

'You can get on very well without me here, Weston,' Mr. Vallory observed graciously; 'and I really feel it my duty to look after Augusta. This

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business has been an awful blow. I think she felt that horrid story of Harcross's past life, which came out during that scoundrel Redmayne's trial, almost more than her husband's death, although she has never admitted as much to me. I am very glad to take her abroad; change of scene and all that kind of thing may do wonders, you know. And I'm very glad she has decided upon selling the lease and furniture in Mastodon-crescent; she'll get rid of all melancholy associations, you see.'

'And sacrifice no end of money,' said Weston, with a lugubrious look. 'She'll realise about as many hundreds as she spent thousands. I have no doubt there's a good deal of consolation in that to anything as inconsistent and unreasonable as a woman.'

'In her present state of mind money is hardly a consideration, Weston,' replied Mr. Vallory, in his pompous way. 'When my daughter returns to England she will reside with me. I have felt my house no home without her. Even my cook has fallen off; I rarely get my favourite curries, or the only soup I really care for. Not that Augusta ever interfered about such trifles; but there was an influence, you
n influence.'

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So Mrs. Harcross departed, and wintered at Rome, whither carriages and horses, and all the paraphernalia of Acropolis-square existence, went with her; where she drove daily upon the Corso with her father, gloomily handsome in her widow's weeds, leaning back listlessly in her open carriage, with eyes that seemed to see neither landscape nor people. She stayed here till the end of March, and spent the summer in pottering about from one German bath to another, in quest of the magical elixir which was to cure her father's gout. They spent the following winter in Paris, where Mr. Vallory hired a luxurious first floor in the Rue César-Auguste, and the Acropolis-square mansion still languished in brown holland and darkness. The irrepressible Weston employed a great deal of his leisure during this winter —which was unusually severe—in crossing and recrossing the Channel. The mail-boat that carried this modern Cæsar and his fortunes ran foul of a French steamer one blusterous midnight, whereby Weston narrowly escaped drowning; but still he held on, dauntless and unflagging as a Queen's Messenger, that hapless slave of the State, whose perils about equal those of a famous warrior, and who is, under the cheeseparing system of our present ad-

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ministration, paid very little better than a butler. He presented himself every now and then in the drawing-room in the Rue César-Auguste to do homage to his cousin Augusta, half an hour before dinner, white-cravated and spotless, with no odour of steamboat or railway clinging to his garments. He had his pet chamber, No. 333 bis, at Meurice's, and rarely found it occupied when he required it. By this unflinching attention—by solicitude that knew no weariness—he did at last contrive to slip back into his old position of usefulness; fetched and carried music and books, and patterns and threads for point-lace work; and felt that he was gaining ground. The star of hope began to shine for him again. The days went on—Mr. Vallory and his daughter came back to England. The Ryde villa and the yacht had been sold, at Augusta's request; were they not bitter to her soul, being so closely associated with the days of her courtship and married life? So Mr. Vallory bought an estate in Warwickshire, seven hundred acres or so, with a huge stucco-fronted mansion, called Copplestoke Manor, a few miles from Leamington, and began a new phase of existence as a country gentleman; taking the chair at vestry meetings, and sitting

bench at petty sessions, and vexing the souls

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of rural legislators with the abstrusest technicalities of the law.

Hither, too, came Weston Vallory, always eager to be useful; but although Mrs. Harcross tolerated him graciously enough in his capacity of light porter, for him there was no riding by her side in hawthorn alleys, or loitering under star-proof elms in the summer night; or drifting gently on the narrow winding river, with a lazy dip of the oars now and then, and an occasional entanglement among green masses of mazy weed. He felt himself a guest on sufferance, and there were times when the star of hope grew dim.

Mrs. Harcross had been three years a widow, but still wore mourning,—resolutely refusing Madame Bouffante the privilege of making her any dress which was not of the black silk and bugly order,—when the star of hope sank altogether in the blackest darkness. Weston had been unusually busy in Old Jewry during the winter term, and had not seen his cousin, either in London or at Copplestoke Manor, for nearly three months, when he came down to the country house for a brief visit.

He arrived at dusk, after a snow-storm, when the drive from the lodge to the house was like a journey through fairyland, although the idea did not occur to

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Weston, who, like the famous French Blue-stocking, abhorred the beauties of nature. He fancied the house had a more festive appearance than usual, even while he lingered for a few minutes in the hall, giving directions about some packages he had brought for Augusta. There were more hot-house flowers, brighter fires, more lights; the servants had a busier, gayer air, for the mansion had been a somewhat sepulchral abode, despite its grandeur, hitherto.

'Has my uncle many visitors?' he asked the butler carelessly.

'No, sir; not many, sir. Lord Stanmore and Edgware is staying with us, sir, and Captain Purfleet; nobody else.'

'Stanmore and Edgware! A new acquaintance,' thought Weston, whose only knowledge of that nobleman was obtained from the *Peerage* and the *Morning Post*. He had an idea that Stanmore and Edgware was elderly, and had never done anything to add lustre to his title, except condescend to exist. 'Humph!' he said, not displeased to find that he was to hob-and-nob with a peer, not a horse-racing or insolvent nobleman, but a respectable landowner. 'Lord Stanmore has a place near here, I suppose?'

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'No, sir; his lordship's estates are in the North, sir. His lordship was stoppin' at Lord Leigh's for the 'untin', before Christmas, and his lordship has been here hever sence.' The butler gave a faint cough, not without some kind of significance, which puzzled Weston a little. But of course it was only the man's elation at having ministered so long to the peerage.

Weston went up-stairs to dress, and arrayed himself with a little more care than usual: put on his favourite boots, and a shirt with Valenciennes medallions which he deemed invincible; his studs were black enamel skulls with diamond eyes; the parting of his hair was perfection. Never had he felt better satisfied with himself, with his arched instep, his moustache, with all his small graces, than as he went down the wide oak staircase, where unwonted parterres of scented geranium and stephanotis regaled his nostrils as he went.

'"Tommy loves a lord,"' he said to himself with a cynical grin. 'I suppose my poor uncle is not exempt from that pardonable weakness of humanity.'

There were only three persons in the drawing-room when he entered—his uncle, Augusta, and a tall bald-headed man with gray moustachios, who stood

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with his back to the fireplace. Mrs. Harcross was seated in a low chair opposite the fire, holding a spangled fan between her face and the blaze of the logs piled on the wide old-fashioned hearth. She wore crimson camellias in her hair and in the bosom of her gauzy black dress, the first gleam of colour that Weston had ever seen her wear since her husband's death; and the gentleman with the gray moustachios was bending down to speak to her, with such an air of chivalrous devotion as may have distinguished King Arthur in the days when Guinevere was true, and the serpent had not yet entered the sacred circle of the king's chosen knights.

The attitude, the look, the tone, revealed all to Weston Valory's rapid comprehension. The star of hope shot downward to abysses unfathomable, never to rise again. Before he went to his comfortable bachelor bedroom in the western wing, he had learnt the worst. His uncle told him everything over a bottle of claret, when the Earl and his satellite Captain Purfleet had left the dining-room, only lingering a few minutes after Augusta's departure.

'It was not a thing I cared to write about,' said Mr. Vallory. 'They have only been engaged three weeks; but from the day we first met Lord Stanmore

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at a hunting breakfast at Stoneleigh, the business was settled. It was a "case," as you fast young men say. Augusta was very much disinclined to hear of such a thing; but I felt that in an affair of this kind her opposition must be borne down—an estate like Stanmore and Edgware, improving in value every year, miles of building frontages on the outskirts of the most populous towns in the North, coal mines, slate quarries, and a man of blameless character,—thirty years or so her senior, I grant; but we know by the experience of mankind that these marriages, founded on a mutual esteem, and—aw, hum—the desire to consolidate a vast estate, are often the happiest.'

'Yes,' cried Weston, breaking in with a bitter laugh; 'but if she had fallen in love with some *poor* devil of the same age, I wonder what you'd have called it? A vicious infatuation, which argues—the sort of thing which Iago says of Desdemona, you know; but of course, as he's an earl and the estate is all right, it's quite another matter.'

'I don't think that's a very genial way of receiving my communication, Weston; I thought you'd be naturally delighted. The match is really a brilliant one, the sort of marriage I always dreamed of for my daughter, before her unfortunate alliance with poor

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Harcross. And even you will profit by it; your status will be not a little improved when you can claim cousinship with a countess. That sort of thing ought to be worth a thousand a year to a man in your position; to say nothing of the probability that you may get the Stanmore land agency before long, and no end of leases and deeds of agreement.'

'I ought to be amazingly grateful, I daresay,' replied Weston, 'but the news is rather startling. I thought my cousin was a model widow, wedded to the dead.'

'Weston,' exclaimed Mr. Vallory, with severity, 'I believe you're a radical!'

So Augusta Harcross, in due time and with no unseemly haste, was translated into a loftier sphere, in which she knew not Weston, or only remembered him faintly at half-yearly intervals, when she permitted his name to be inscribed by some menial hand on one of her invitation cards.

Her husband's private secretary attended to these minor details. He had a book given him, upon whose right-hand pages were inscribed the sheep, or exalted personages, who must be invited to all large assemblies, and upon whose left-hand appeared the obscure

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herd of goats, who were to be bidden once or so in a season, if convenient.

Augusta had prime ministers and royal dukes to dine with her in these latter days, and Weston attended receptions so crowded that he was fain to depart without having so much as caught a 'little look across the crowd' from his hostess and kinswoman. But he did in somewise console himself with the idea that he gained in social distinction by his cousin's advancement, and he received numerous applications from acquaintances of his own who wanted to obtain Lady Stanmore's influence for this or for that. It was a meagre consolation, but it was something. He had his dainty little villa at Norwood, his well-groomed horses, roses that were never permitted to suffer from the green fly, and he had all the keen delights of an ever-increasing business in Old Jewry.

For some favoured creatures life seems all sunshine. No shadow has darkened Clevedon Hall since the horror of Hubert Harcross's murder, and some new joys have come to brighten that pleasant home. Little voices sound gaily and little feet patter swiftly in the corridors of Clevedon to-day, and in these latter years there are larger butterflies than 'Greeks' or

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'Trojans,' 'Camberwell beauties,' 'Peacocks' eyes,' or 'Painted ladies' to be seen hovering about the flower-beds in the old-fashioned gardens. Sibyl Clevedon has become Sibyl Hardwood, and brings her babies from Tunbridge Wells every other day to compare Tottie's new tooth with her cousin Lottie's, or to inquire if Migsy's symptoms in the opening stage of measles are as satisfactory as those exhibited by Popsy in the same disease. Happy English households, about which there is so little to tell! The Colonel exists in a seventh heaven of grandpaternal rapture, which verges on senility. The Bungalow brims over with babies—for are not Sibyl's children a kind of left-handed grandchildren of his?—and the quadruped favourites during these irruptions of the juvenile population feel themselves more or less at a disadvantage. Pedro snaps or spits his displeasure; the dogs retire under low chairs to growl at the invader; the mungoose disappears from human ken, to be found perhaps at nightfall, by some frightened housemaid, snugly coiled under the Colonel's duvet. The Colonel stuffs the little ones with currie-bât, and Bombay ducks, which provoke unwonted thirst in these small epicures, and dried fruits from Affghanistan, and West-Indian preserved

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ginger, and ministers to their little appetites with all the art he knows; for which reason lengthened visits to the Bungalow are apt to result in bilious attacks and the exhibition of doctor's stuff.

Brierwood, forfeited for ever by Richard Redmayne's crime, has passed into the hands of the stranger. The deed of gift by which he bestowed Bulrush Meads upon his brother James has preserved the Gippsland farm from the grasp of the law; but the gray old Kentish homestead, with the red-tiled roof that shone out warmly from the green background of an English landscape, has gone from the house of Redmayne for ever.* The day will come perhaps, distant yet, but dimly possible in the future, when Rick Redmayne's bonds may be loosened; when, as a reward for unflinching toil and unvarying good conduct, the quiet submission of a repentant sinner, who feels that his burden can never be too heavy for the measure of his offence, he may go forth from the drear monotony of that prison island, an old man, with grizzled hair, and rugged deep-lined countenance, a man whose shoulders are bent with long

* The law is now more merciful: the property of a felon is no longer escheated to the crown.

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labour, go forth, free at the last, to that fairer, wider world for which his soul longs. Not to Brierwood, the lost home of sad memories, the house haunted by his dead daughter's ghost, the place whose gloomy influence well-nigh drove him mad; but to the fertile plains and inland seas of Gippsland, to the mountains and the watersheds where tall gum-trees shoot upward under the cloudless blue sky, where the ringing note of the bell-bird sounds keen and clear in the tranquil distance.

THE END.

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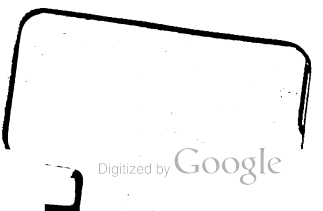
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